

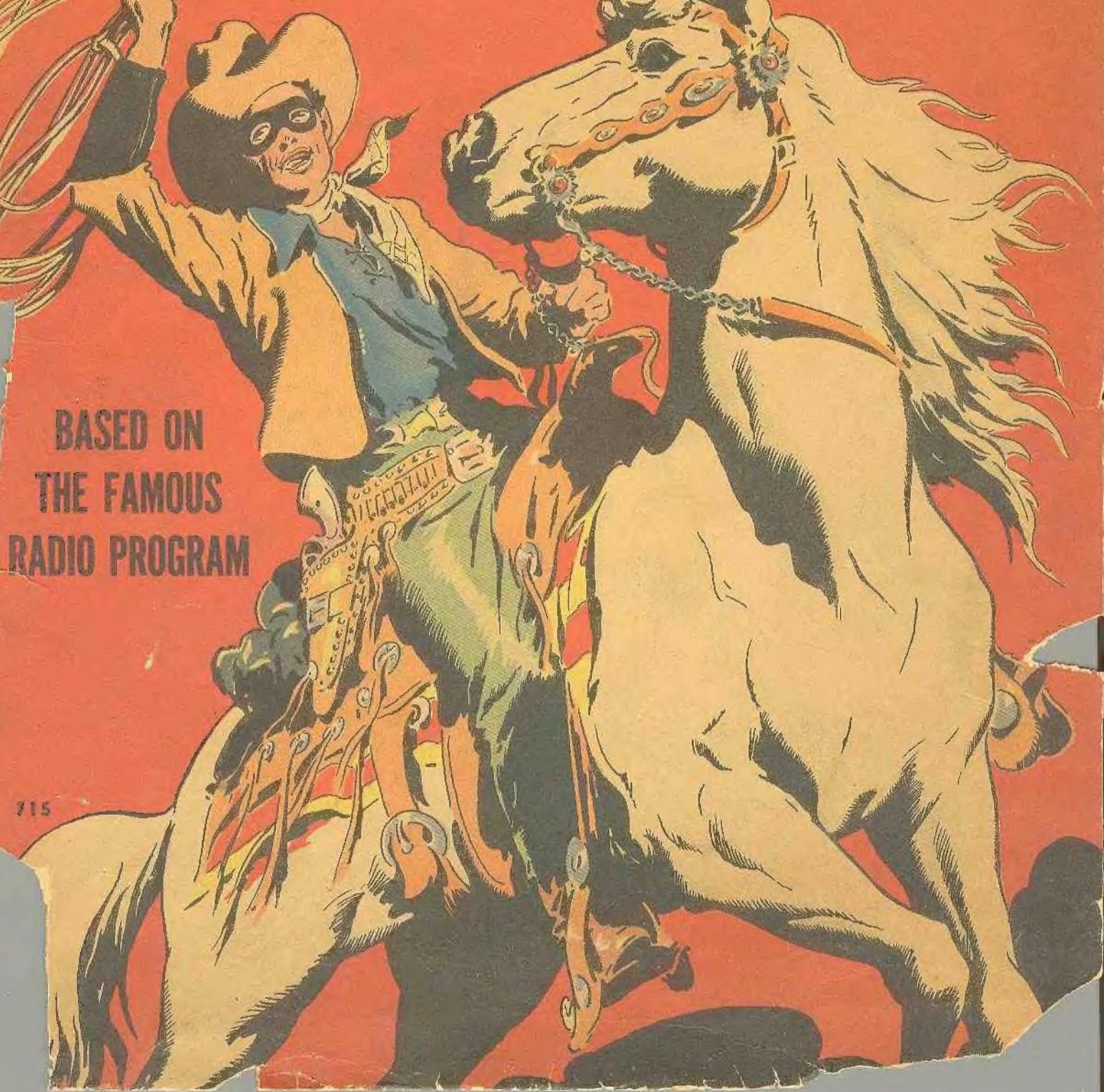
HI-YO SILVER THE LONE RANGER TO THE RESCUE

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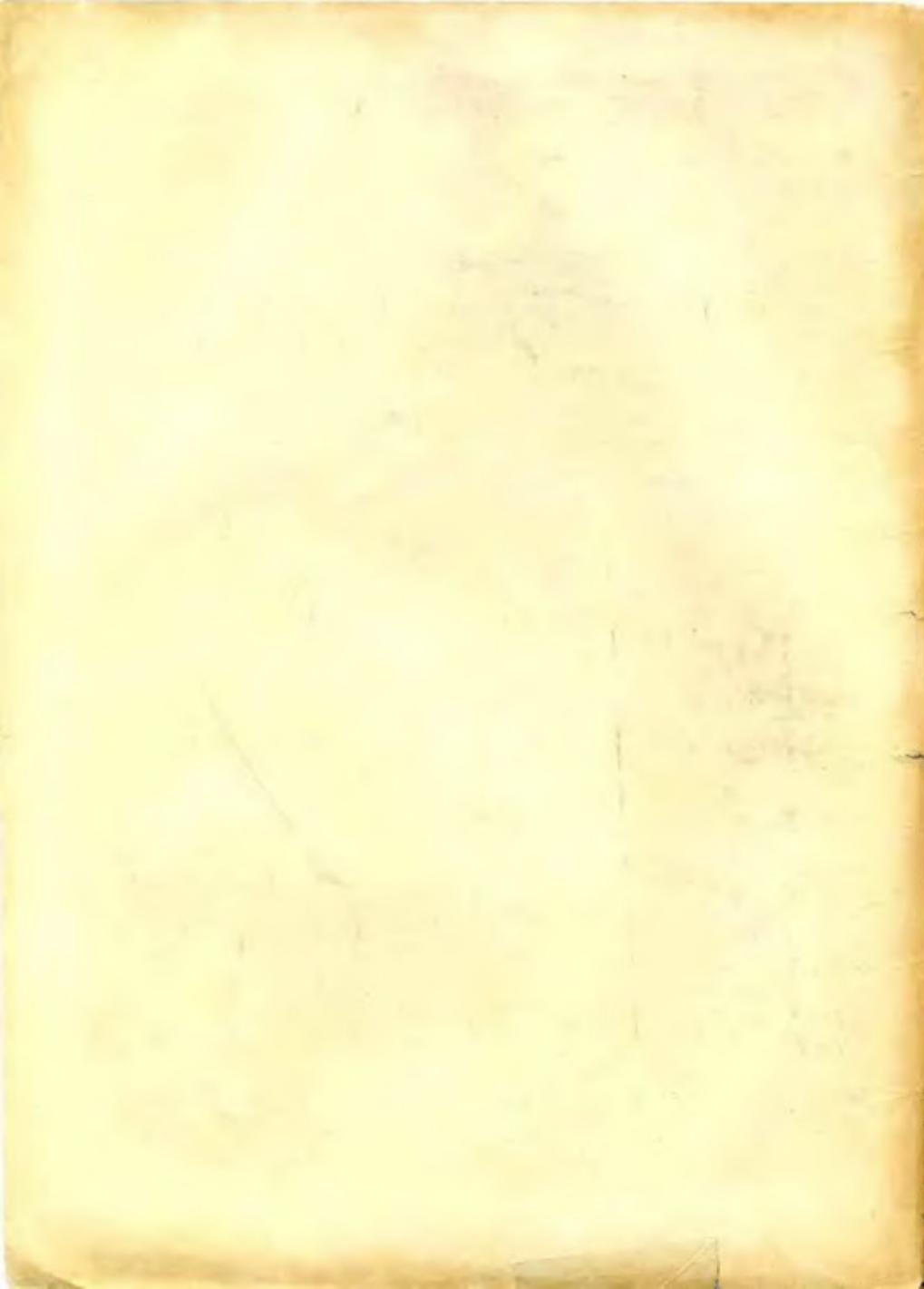
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A-I-YO SILVER THE LONE RANGER TO THE RESCUE



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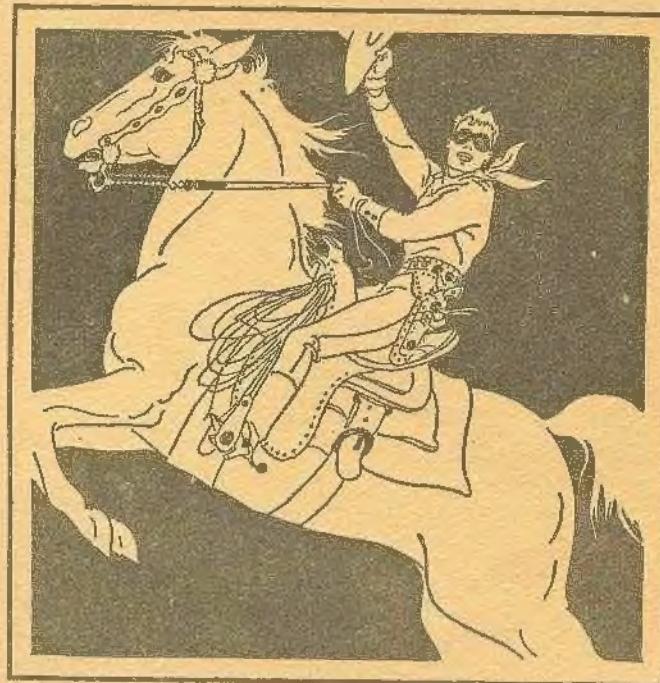


HI-YO SILVER!

The Lone Ranger

to the Rescue

By FRAN STRIKER



Based on the Famous Radio Series with SILVER and TONTO

Illustrated by HENRY E. VALLEY

Billy King

3445 Columbia St. N.W.

Washington.

D.C.



The Lights From the Gleaming Windows Were a Welcome Sight

The Lone Ranger to the Rescue

CHAPTER I

The Masked Man

THE LIGHTS that gleamed from the windows in the low-lying buildings ahead were a welcome sight to the two travel-weary men who pushed their tired horses through the early night. Dusk had gone but half an hour, but the night was already pitch-dark, without stars or moon to light the trail. The horses, that had maintained a steady gait to now, were allowed to slow to a walk, rather than risk a bad fall because of a gopher hole or stone. The white horse was slightly larger than the Paint that walked alongside, but both were above the average height for western horses.

"Goose River," murmured the man on the taller horse.

The town ahead marked the end of five hard days of travel. The stops had been as brief as possible, they took only sufficient sleep to keep going, and ate hurriedly prepared meals. Now the goal was at last in sight.

"Goose River," repeated the Indian who rode the Paint Horse.

The two were on the trail of a man named Slade—Dan Slade, charged with murder, worst of all, the murder of a Texas Ranger. There were many killers in the west, cattle rustlers, horse thieves, highwaymen, and swindlers. Men who would dare practically anything for easy cash, EXCEPT the murder of a Texas Ranger. This was considered practically the same as suicide.

The rider of the big white stallion spoke again.

"If we don't hear anything of Slade in Goose River, Tonto, we'll stop there overnight and catch

up a little on rest. The horses will need a chance to rest up too."

"Then where go-um?"

"Then we'll cut north and head for the hills. I have heard that Slade has friends, high in the hills."

The speaker was tall and rangy, and sat the saddle with the easy grace of one who spent most of his life on a horse. Beneath the white ten-gallon hat, the upper part of his face was masked. There were countless stories told about this mysterious masked character and his Indian companion. He was called the Lone Ranger. No one knew him by any other name. As the Lone Ranger, the masked mystery rider, he had become known through seven states.

Many people claimed there was no law west of the Pecos, save the law of the Lone Ranger. Outlaws feared his matchless courage and the lightning speed of his brace of heavy guns. Many thanked their Creator for sending the Lone Ranger to aid them in time of trouble.

Tonto, his companion, was a well-established character in the west. Long association with the masked man had taught him many of the white man's traits and habits, while he retained all the Indian lore and skill of his ancestors. Keen ability at following a trail, vast knowledge of the curative and healing powers of herbs and roots, and a thorough understanding of Nature in all her moods, made Tonto the perfect complement for the Lone Ranger.

The Lone Ranger spoke again.

"The Texas Rangers," he said, "are pretty sure that Dan Slade left the state. That puts him out of their jurisdiction. The lawmen in other states have trouble enough of their own, without worry-

ing about hunting for a fugitive from Texas."

Tonto grunted agreement.

"That's why I gave my word to those Texas Rangers that we'd run Dan Slade down, and take him back to them, if it was humanly possible to do it."

Tonto, for once, did not seem to be in hearty accord with the Lone Ranger's plans. He would help, as a matter of course. He would use all his skill and knowledge to aid in bringing Dan Slade, charged with the murder of a Texas Ranger, to justice, but for some peculiar reason, he was not enthusiastic about the project.

Tonto seemed to sense that there were circumstances that had not yet been told. Perhaps the Lone Ranger felt the same but his word was pledged, and he had no choice. He would, if possible, take Dan Slade back to Texas.

The two were close to town, and had already passed a couple of the outlying houses. It was dark behind the buildings, save where a lighted window threw a square of light upon the ground. One of the buildings down the line a way gave out sounds of laughter and gaiety.

"We'll stop there," decided the Lone Ranger, "and leave our horses in back. If Dan Slade is in Goose River, he'll go to the cafe sooner or later. Perhaps we'll find him there."

The Lone Ranger and Tonto ground-hitched their horses behind the "Jackpot Cafe."

CHAPTER II

"Goose River Bad Man"

THINGS were pretty lively in the Jackpot that evening. A score of cowboys with three months' pay in their pockets had taken over the town and were doing their best to make things hum as long as their money lasted. Drinks were freely bought for everyone in the house, by each of the "punchers" in turn, and most of the tables were filled with card games for high stakes, while a ring of watchers surrounded the chairs at each table.

Above the hubbub of the smoke-filled room, an orchestra composed of two fiddles and a bat-



"We'll Stop There."

tered old piano made what some called music, at the far end of the big room on a small platform. This was something rare in Goose River. Musicians seldom stopped there, and they were a treat to the Goose River folks.

There were about a dozen who had come simply to listen. They stood to one side of the platform, their aged faces happy and their eyes a-sparkle as the tunes recalled memories of their days in the East.

Surrounded by the several kinds of pleasure, recreation, and amusement, one man stood alone. He was at one end of the long, highly-polished bar. His face might have been handsome if it had not been set in such grim, hard lines. He seemed young, at a casual glance, but the lines that creased his forehead, where his hat was shoved back, and the grooves of what seemed to be a permanent frown on each side of his mouth, aged him. He paid no attention to what went on around him. Each new arrival at the Jackpot came in for a careful scrutiny by the steely, steady, gray eyes of the silent man, and then went disregarded. He had a drink before him on the bar, but he was not drinking.

The silent man, who did not drink; whose face seemed young, yet old; who took no part in the

fun at the Jackpot, was Dan Slade—wanted for the murder of a Texas Ranger.

The music stopped, and there was a scattering of handclapping from the old folks who had been listening to it. Dan Slade glanced toward them, and when he saw the pleasure in the wrinkled faces of the white-haired old folks, his expression softened just a little bit. But it hardened at once when he heard the snarling, reedy, high-pitched voice of Ebenezer Gorman.

"Git back tuh yer shack where yuh belong," he bawled at an elderly couple who cringed before his fury. "What right've you got dawdin' the evenin' away here when yuh should be home a-sleepin'?"

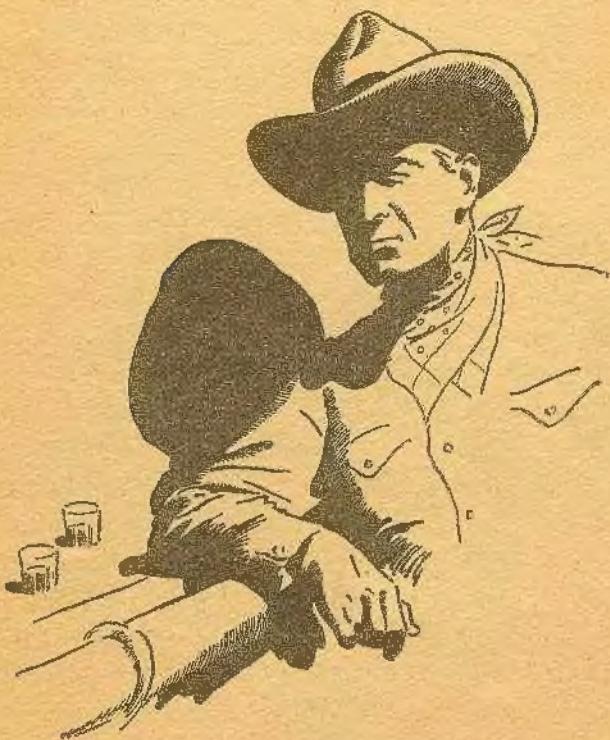
The narrow-chested man with the white hair tried to speak above Gorman's fury, "We was only—" he began.

"Nemmine no excuses. Now you git!"

Dan Slade saw the old couple leave the place in a hurry, the woman clinging to her husband's arm. Baldy, the bartender, growled and swung a towel viciously at a fly that settled on the bar.

"Dirty, slave-drivin' polecat," he muttered.

"Matter?" asked Slade curiously.



One Man Stood Alone

"Ah, that rat makes me sore. That was Ebenezer Gorman yuh heard speakin'. The coyote ain't fit tuh live."

A close observer would have seen a trace of a smile break Dan Slade's thin lips.

"How is that?" he inquired.

"Them old folks, the Loftus folks, work fer Gorman. No man ever treated black slaves worse'n Gorman treats 'em. I wish tuh gosh Dan Slade would come back tuh Goose River an' put a bullet through Gorman's yaller hide."

Baldy slapped the bar with the towel and turned to refill a couple glasses, but Dan Slade gripped his arm. "Wait!"

Baldy turned back. "Eh?"

"What was that name you just mentioned?"

"Dan Slade."

"Who is he?"

"Oh, you wouldn't know him, stranger. He used tuh live around here. That was before I come here. He left tuh join the army an' that was the last that uz heard from him fer some time. Next thing we heard was that he'd killed a Texas Ranger somewhere south o' here, an' had gone outlaw."

"Why do you want him to come back here?"

"Wal, folks says there was bad blood between Gorman an' the Slade family. Mebbe if Dan Slade come back, bein' as he's already due tuh swing when he's caught, an' bein' as yuh can't hang a man more'n once, no matter how many men he kills, he'd put old Skinflint Gorman outeren the way before he got caught."

For a moment, Dan Slade stood silent, after Baldy left. Curious, to hear a stranger speak of himself in that way. They wanted him to come back and drill old Gorman, eh? Well he had come back, though as yet no one had recognized him. Small wonder though; he had changed a lot since he had left Goose River years ago, to join the army.

Baldy drifted back to Slade's end of the bar again.

"Say there, stranger," he began, "where you from anyhow?"

"Why?"

"Gorman was askin' a couple boys down yon-

der." He pointed to the opposite end of the bar.

Slade looked in the direction, and caught Ebenezer Gorman staring at him steadily. As their eyes met, Gorman looked down, and walked slowly toward him.

Dan spoke to Baldy in a soft voice, "You'd better stand back a little, barkeep. There might be some lead flyin' around here."

Baldy stared wide-eyed, and then scuttled out of the way. He did not stop to ask for more details. Long experience in bartending in the West had taught Baldy that when gunplay started, it started with scant warning, and was over just as quickly.

Gorman was approaching.

Dan Slade watched the mean-faced man who carried a heavy cane—more as a symbol of affluence, for the cane had a head of solid gold—than because of any need for it. He saw two younger men, with whom Gorman had been talking a moment before, coming close behind the unpopular slave-driver. Each younger man held one hand on a gun butt. They came, set expressions frozen in their faces.

Four paces away, Gorman stopped, and the two behind him ranged alongside. Dan pushed his hat back a little farther, to give Ebenezer Gorman a good look at his face. His other hand, he dropped to his belt, his fingers only an inch from his gun.

Gorman screamed a single word:
"SLADE!"

Exclamations came from half a dozen men at once. Baldy ducked out of sight behind the bar. Gorman's two companions jerked at their guns, but Dan Slade had his weapon already bearing on them.

"STAND!" he barked.

"I'll drop the first man who shows blue steel. I'm not here to kill anyone. I'd as soon leave town without another notch in my gun butt, so you just stand where you are, and don't let your hands get nervous, and you'll all be able to talk about Dan Slade over a drink five minutes from now."

His heel kicked a door behind him open, and he stepped through, into the night. The door slammed shut, while a score of men began to talk at once. Dan Slade was in Goose River.



Gorman Screamed a Single Word: "SLADE!"



Looking in, the Masked Man and the Indian Saw a Cane Being Brandished

CHAPTER III A Second Pledge

THE LONE RANGER and Tonto were moving along the side of the Jackpot Cafe, planning to take advantage of the nearest window to study the interior without being seen, and determine whether or not Dan Slade, the man they sought, was there.

Just as they reached the window, they heard Gorman's voice shrilling at Mr. and Mrs. Loftus. Looking in, they saw the heavy cane being brandished over the gray heads of the aged couple, and the Lone Ranger snatched a gun, and held it ready. He would have fired, had that cane started to descend on one of the two it threatened. He was able, however, a moment later, to holster his unfired gun.

Something tugged at the masked man's heart-strings when he saw the look of utter despair, the stoop of hopelessness and defeat, that Gorman's

words brought to the couple. When Loftus and his wife left the place, the Lone Ranger determined on a plan of action.

"Tonto," he whispered quickly, "you stay here and study the inside of that place. Watch for Dan Slade, while I follow those old folks and see where they live."

"What you do-un that for?"

"I'd like to know more about them. If it's possible, I want to help them. White people shouldn't be treated as those two were. No man has the right to make slaves of people now! The war that's just ended settled all that."

"That right."

"You know Dan Slade by sight. If he's inside there, keep your eye on him, and if he leaves, you follow him. See where he goes and leave a trail that I can follow."

Tonto nodded that he would do so, and the Lone Ranger left to follow Lem and Sara Loftus.

Long strides carried the masked man down the dusty road in the direction the old couple had

taken. It was dark, and he could not see them, but he sensed they must be somewhere in the gloom ahead. He walked for perhaps a quarter of a mile.

Suddenly, light glowed from the window of a small shack just to the right of the trail. The illumination that streamed out showed a gleaming wire fence that appeared to surround well-kept acreage. A huge rambling house stood gauntly as a darker blob against the dark sky, farther back from the road than the cottage that had just been lighted.

"Gorman's home," the masked man decided, "and that cottage must be where the couple live."

He advanced to the lighted window, and looked inside. For several minutes Lem puttered about the one room of the cottage, and then sank with a deep sigh to a home-made chair. His wife sat in a rocker, and folded her blue-veined hands in her lap. For a time, neither spoke. Then Lem stroked his cheek and said, "It's an honest debt, Sara, an honest debt that we've got to pay. That's all there is to it."

The Lone Ranger strained close to the window to catch all that was said.

"I know, Lem," sighed the woman. "But he pays us so pitifully little for the work we do."

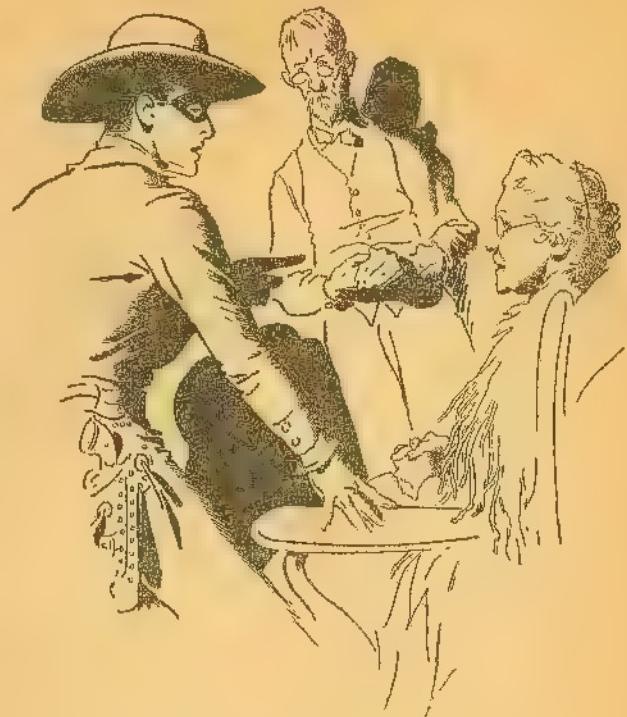
"But we don't have no choice, honey. If he didn't let us work for him, we couldn't find work anywhere else, and then we couldn't ever pay him what we owe. After all, it's fair of Mr. Gorman to give us the chance to work off the debt."

The Lone Ranger thought, as he watched the little lady rock in silence for several moments, that these people should have finished with hard toil, years ago. They should be now living in peace and comfort, instead of fear and uncertainty. The woman seemed about to speak.

"Ten years more of work before that debt is paid off. I—I get bitter thinkin' about it sometimes, Lem. Ten years is a long time, for folks our age. It isn't as if Mr. Gorman needed the money. He has all he ever can spend. More than he can spend."

"I know Sara, but after all . . ."

"And it isn't," continued Sara Loftus, "as if we'd had the money, and spent it, or stolen it, or



The Lone Ranger Said He Wished
to Be Their Friend

something like that. I—I just can't see where it's fair or just."

Neither could the Lone Ranger. Without waiting to hear more, he left the window, moved to the door of the house, and went inside.

The sudden appearance of the masked man frightened Loftus and Sara, but he hastened to reassure them.

"Please," he began, "don't be afraid. I'm here as a friend. I want to help you."

"Wh-who are y-y-you?" stammered Lem. "P-Please don't rob us, stranger; we haven't anything you'd care to steal."

"Listen to me, and you'll understand that I'm not here to rob you." The tone of the deep, soft voice did more to calm the frightened couple than anything he might have said. "Please don't think me a robber, just because I wear a mask. The truth is just the opposite. I came here to help you. I came to find out why you're slaves to Ebenezer Gorman."

The fear in Lem's face subsided. "There . . . there isn't much to tell," he said.

"Tell me whatever there is."

"Go on, Lemuel."

"Well," began Lem, "the whole thing is that we owe Mr. Gorman a lot of money, more than we could ever pay him if he didn't hire us to work for him. So we're workin' for him, and he's applyin' our salary against our debt. That's about all there is to it."

"How did you get so far in debt to a man like that?"

"Oh, it goes back years. It . . . It's too long a story to burden a stranger with."

"Can a FRIEND be a stranger?"

"Eh?" Lem looked somewhat confused by this remark.

"I told you that I was a friend. Doesn't that make me something more than a stranger?"

Lem thought this over for a little while. Then, urged by Sara, he began.

"He gave me some cash. It was in a little pouch. I was to use that gold dust for a grubstake. The first night I camped out, it was stolen from me, so I had to turn back. I lost the claim, of course, because it wasn't worked. I owed Gorman the cash, and we been workin' for him ever since, tuh pay it back."

Lem's voice continued through the Lone Ranger's thoughts.

"We don't have much left, Sara and I. What clothes we have are pretty well gone, and what furniture we had when we left the East has been sold to repay some of what we owed to Mr. Gorman, and as for our house, well, this shack was built fer his Chinese cook to live in."

The Lone Ranger noted that, while small and humble, it showed careful cleaning, and Sara's hands had dressed it to the best of her ability with bits of calico for curtains, and wild plants, potted in empty cans.

"But what we have got left," continued Lem, "is our good word of honor, and we're goin' to hang on to that. I appreciate your comin' here, and your wantin' to help us, but we wouldn't take charity, and there's no way anyone can help."

This seemed to close the matter, as far as Lem was concerned. The Lone Ranger asked a few more questions before he left.

He was in a hurry to get back to the Jackpot, see if Slade was around the town, and meet Tonto. Then, if he did not find Slade, he wished to take the time that evening to call on Ebenezer Gorman. He had a few ideas about that stolen gold dust.

CHAPTER IV

"Kill Or Be Killed"

THE LONE RANGER'S mind was occupied with thoughts of the old couple as he retraced his steps to town to meet Tonto. The more he thought of them, and their tired hands, their careworn faces, the more anxious he was to find Dan Slade, so he could return to this community and take up the cause of Lem and Sara.

When he reached the Jackpot, Tonto was not in sight, so the Lone Ranger started around the other side of the cafe, where he found his friend. Tonto was stretched out, prone, unconscious on the ground. He dropped hurriedly on one knee, and felt for a pulse, but it was unnecessary. Tonto was already regaining consciousness, and mumbling beneath his breath.

"What happened, Tonto?"

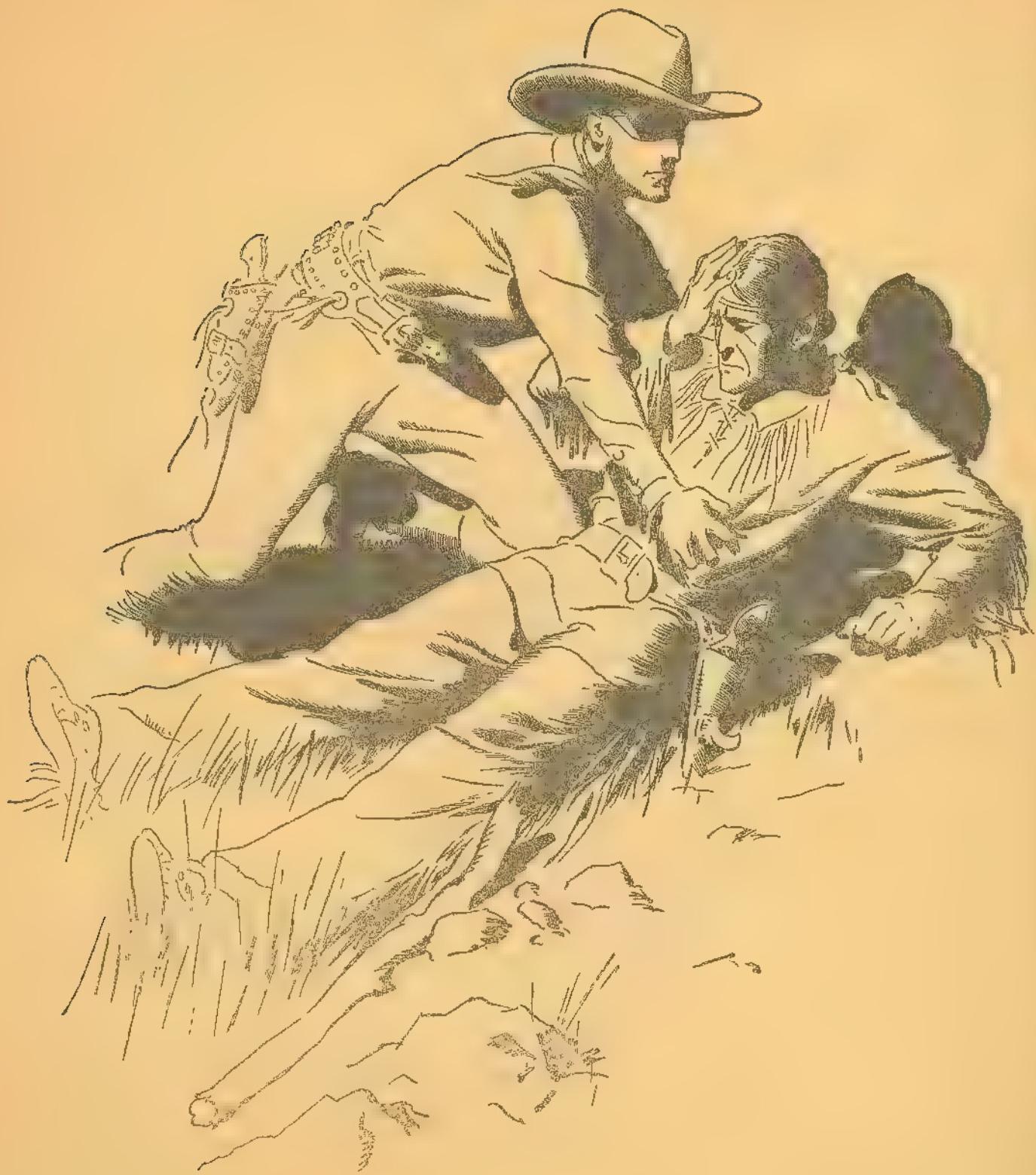
"Feller name . . . Slade."

"Dan Slade?"

Tonto struggled to a sitting posture, aided by the Lone Ranger. He felt the large bump on the back of his head, while he murmured, "Him feller. He . . . me not hurt bad. No worry. Tonto all right."

He shook his head, as if to clear it, and then staggered just a little as he gained his feet. It took a hard blow to drop the sturdy Tonto, but his recovery from the blow was rapid. He explained to the Lone Ranger how Dan Slade had come through the rear door of the Jackpot Cafe, and skirted the place to get his horse from the hitchrack in front. Tonto had seen him and tried to stop him, but Slade clubbed his pistol, and knocked Tonto down.

The Lone Ranger listened to the Indian's story.



Tonto Struggled to a Sitting Posture, Aided by the Lone Ranger

Tonto rarely let a captive escape his brawny arms. Tonto outweighed Dan Slade, and Tonto was at least four inches taller. Could it have been that Tonto WANTED the outlaw to escape? As they walked back to where the big beasts waited, the Lone Ranger spoke in a soft and understanding voice.

"Let me tell you something, Tonto."

"Ugh."

"I know how you feel about Dan Slade. You don't want to see him hanged in Texas. You know that I'm pledged to find him, if I can, but you're not bound by any such pledge. I can understand why you might be willing to let him escape from you."

Tonto did not make any comment.

"There's something you don't understand though, Tonto." The masked man went on as though he were speaking to a schoolboy who had played truant. "When I made that pledge, I made it because I felt that I could count on your help. If I hadn't been sure of that help, I wouldn't have been able to make such a pledge. We've ridden a lot of trails together, you and I, haven't we?"

"That right."

"A lot of trails that would never have ended, if it hadn't been for you. If Dan Slade has left Goose River, he's left a trail. YOU can follow that trail, where white men cannot. The trail might be too faint for me to see, but you could follow it. You could lead me on the wrong trail, and make it impossible for me to keep the promise I made to the Texas Rangers, or you could follow the trail and help me."

They stood beside the horses, and were ready to mount.

"Which are you going to do?"

Tonto looked up quickly, surprised that the masked man should ask such a question.

"Me help." A moment's pause, and then he said more slowly, "Tonto plenty sorry. Me not double-cross good friend again."

The Lone Ranger gripped his Indian friend's big arm in the darkness.

"Thanks, Tonto."

Once again, there was that understanding be-

tween the two—an understanding that baffled so many people in the West.

"But me got-um more to say," went on the Indian. "Me not want-um you to meet Dan Slade."

He went on to explain his reason for trying to keep the two men from meeting. When he and Dan Slade had met and fought, Slade had told him several things. He told the Indian that he knew the Lone Ranger was behind him. That he knew the Lone Ranger would pursue his trail relentlessly until they met, and he hoped that day would never come. Dan told Tonto, to explain to the Lone Ranger, that when they met, it would be KILL OR BE KILLED.

CHAPTER V

The Trail Back

WITH DAN SLADE so close at hand, the Lone Ranger abandoned his intentions to spend the night in town. Instead, with the rising of the moon, he prevailed upon Tonto to pick up the trail of the outlaw.

Dan Slade took the direction the Lone Ranger thought he would. He was heading due north, toward the hills where he was believed to have some friends who might give him a place of hiding.

During the first hour of the chase, the two stallions of the Lone Ranger and Tonto travelled at a steady ground-devouring lope. Neither the masked man nor the Indian had anything to say. Both felt that the end of their journey must be close at hand.

They had left the grasslands and were in foothills now, with the ground strewn with rocks that made uncertain footing for the horses. Dan's course led along the bottom of an old creek bed where the stones were smaller. Progress was slower now, but it was better to go slower, and be sure of the trail, than to race blindly on and lose it.

Each of these delays, however, made it possible for Slade, unhampered by a trail that he must follow, to increase his lead. A couple of times



The Lone Ranger and Tonto Followed the Trail

In the course of the night, the Lone Ranger and Tonto found places where Slade had stopped to rest and water his horse. But they could not gain ground here, because they too had to stop for the same reasons. The Lone Ranger recalled that he had wanted to call on Ebenezer Gorman that night before he left, but the chase of Slade made that impossible. If they had not been so close to him, perhaps . . .

As the sun came up, the two had to stop and make a camp. They could not go indefinitely without food, and the horses were badly in need of rest. There was a spring-fed stream of water conveniently near, and plenty of firewood handy. They drew their horses to a halt, and let them graze in the poor pasturage along the creek bed. Then they themselves sank to the ground to rest a while, and stretch their saddle-weary limbs, before preparing food.

Having finished their breakfast, the Lone Ranger and Tonto started out once more. The trail was much easier to follow in the daylight, and they made good time.

The sun rose and the day grew hotter. Once

more the alkali dust bothered the throats of the men and the nostrils of the horses. Wet bandanas gave some relief, but not enough.

At the point where Dan Slade finally left the arroyo, he left a clearly visible message attached to the branch of a tree for the Lone Ranger to find and read.

The Lone Ranger snatched the paper from the branch without dismounting. It was written in a good hand, and addressed to the Lone Ranger. Unfolding it, he read:

"To the Lone Ranger:

I know you're after me, but I left some unfinished business in Goose River, so I'll have to go back there. I had to lead you in a circle, so it would be dark when I got back. Maybe I can get my job there done, and get away again, before you catch me. If I can't, you'd better be prepared to shoot it out, because I'd sooner die than go back to Texas to hang for something that I didn't do."

The note was signed with Dan Slade's name.

"Something he didn't do," murmured the Lone Ranger.

Tonto nodded.

"You've said, Tonto, that you didn't think Dan Slade was as guilty as he was made out to be, but this is his own word that he is innocent."

"You believe-um?" queried the Indian.

"It isn't for us to decide, Tonto. It's up to a jury."

The face of Tonto fell.

"He'll have to go back and stand trial. If he's guilty, he'll hang, if not, he'll no longer have to evade and dodge the law as he's been doing."

"Plenty innocent men hang in Texas," argued Tonto.

But he knew that argument was useless. Dan Slade's trail left the arroyo for the grassy bank on the right-hand side. Silver was led up the bank, and then the Lone Ranger, seeing Slade's spoor heading back toward Goose River, put the mighty snow-white stallion in full flight with his familiar ringing cry:

"Hi-Yo Silver!"

closing it gently behind him.

Gorman relaxed in a convenient chair, well pleased with himself,

"Gittin' so I c'n work myself intuh a real rage without no trouble at all," he murmured complacently. "Guess I'll have the Chink fix up a coolin' drink now. It's a sort o' warm this evenin'." He raised his voice to a higher pitch.

"Lee!" he shrilled. "Yuh yeller heathen, come here when I call yuh!"

The door at his right opened and a figure pushed through. Gorman heard the creak of a pine floor board, but did not bother to turn his head until a soft, calm voice that was in no way similar to his Oriental houseboy's, spoke.

"Yer Chinaman can't come, Gorman, but I'm here instead."

Gorman's jaw dropped and he whirled to see the trim figure of a blond-haired man with a grim face. He leaped to his feet, gasping in surprise and fear.

"Dan Slade!"

"Remember me, eh, Gorman? Remembered

CHAPTER VI

Slade's Unfinished Business

DON'T TELL me you done all the work you could!" Ebenezer Gorman almost screamed in his rage.

It was evening and the irate man had summoned the aged Lem Loftus from his humble cottage to his big, rambling house.

"Yer lettin' me down, Loftus, an' I won't stand for it."

He leaned against a table facing his hired hand, who stood in fear and trembling, holding a battered old hat in his two knotted hands.

"Yer goin' lazy on me!"

Lem was not the only one to know the outbursts of Ebenezer Gorman. Every man who worked for him had seen them, but only Lem and Sarah took them seriously.

"Now git back tuh yer shack," Gorman snarled. "Tell yer wife what I said, an' see that tomorrow brings with it better work from yuh."

Lem nodded and backed through the door,



"Go to That Door an' Call That Old Couple Here!"

me when you saw me last night in the Jackpot Saloon!"

Gorman let out a frantic howl.

"Lee!"

"There ain't no use callin' him, Gorman. Yuh see, I took the trouble to rope anyone that was likely to interfere with our little talk. Fact is, you can shout yer head off, if you want to!"

"The law is huntin' you!"

"Glad you know about that. It sort o' shows you how anxious I was to come and have a talk with you. I was bein' chased away from here, Gorman. I risked capture to come back an' see you. I didn't aim to bother when I passed through Goose River, but after I thought over the way you spoke tuh them two old folk last night in the Jackpot, it sort o' rankled in my mind, an' that was when I decided I'd come back here, an' see you."

"Wait, Dan," begged the trembling man. "I've got somethin' for you here, jest wait'll I git it from the table drawer. I want tuh show yuh . . ."

"No!" snapped Dan. "You ain't got a thing I want to see, Gorman. That's an old trick, pullin' a gun from a drawer an' firin' beneath the table! Now sit down there in that chair an' listen to me."

He advanced a pace and pushed hard against the skinny chest of Gorman. Ebenezer staggered back a pace and sat down hard in the chair.

"There's two men trackin' me down, an' I don't know how soon they'll be here, so we gotta work fast, Gorman. I'll be pretty much put out if you try to stall for time. It wouldn't be a smart thing to do."

"Wha . . . what do you want?" stammered Gorman.

The man was genuinely frightened by the menacing coolness of Dan Slade.

"Go to that door an' call that old couple here!"

Gorman had noticed several notches cut in the handle of Dan Slade's weapon. He did not know that they had been put there by the former owner of the gun, Texas Ranger Jim Brealt.

Dan saw Gorman's eyes resting on the gun butt.

"Hurry," he snapped, "unless you want to be

represented by a notch yourself."

Gorman had no choice. He went to the door and called once. From outside in the darkness, Lem responded. Then the trembling, frightened Gorman, uncertain as to what might be forthcoming, told Loftus to come and bring his wife with him.

CHAPTER VII

A Tyrant Meets His Match

WARY, lest Dan Slade was preparing some sort of trap, the Lone Ranger and Tonto watched the trail of Dan Slade with the greatest of care, when night came again. Just as Slade had promised, it led straight back to Goose River by the shortest route, but it did not enter the town itself. Instead, it took the masked man and the Indian around the edge of town, to the big place where Gorman lived.

It certainly did not look like any trap. Slade had come directly to the place the Lone Ranger had wanted to visit the night before.

"Wonder what he came here for," he muttered to Tonto as they both dismounted to leave their horses and progress on foot. "He said he had some unfinished business. That's curious. I had some business with Gorman myself, and had to leave it unfinished."

The moonlight glistened on something in Tonto's hand. The Lone Ranger looked closer, and saw the gleaming blade of Tonto's knife.

"Remember," he whispered, "we want to take Dan Slade back to Texas, alive."

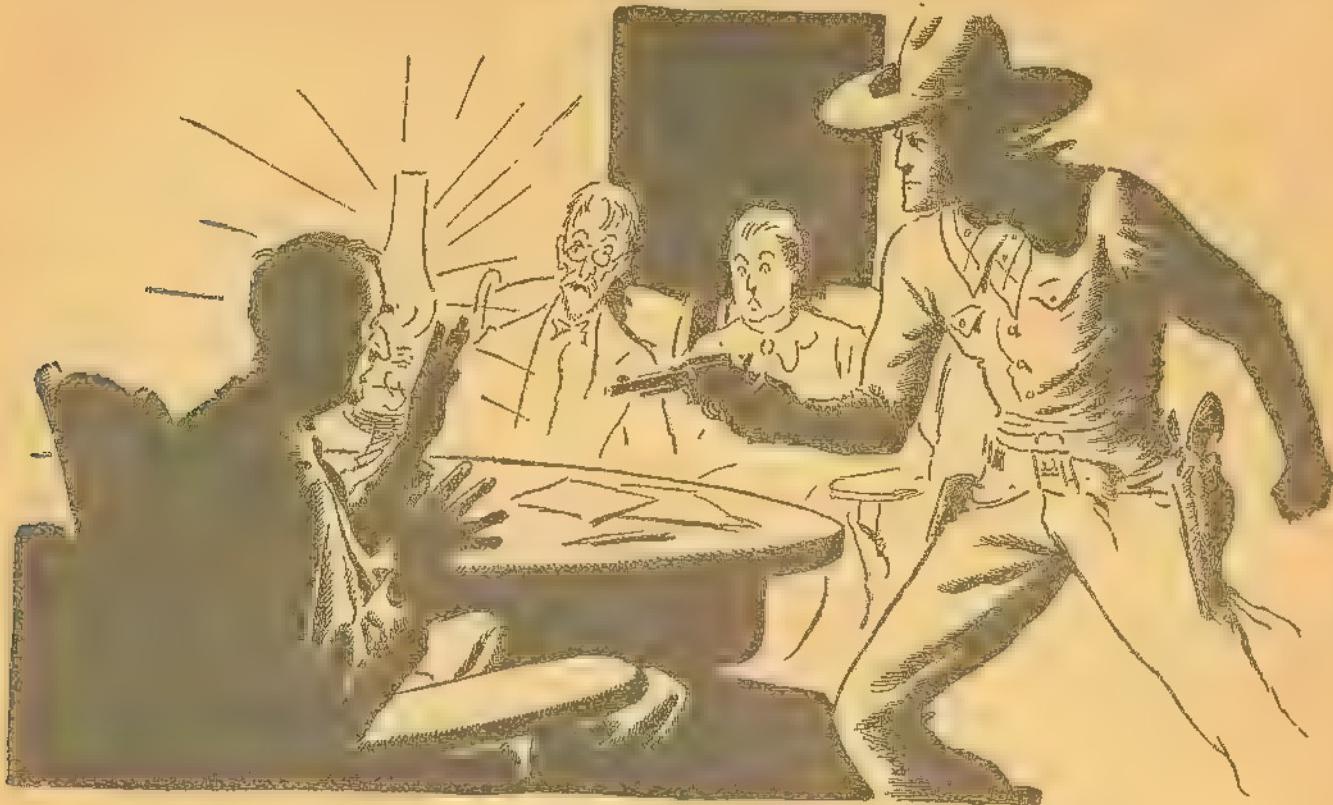
"You not get-um killed," explained Tonto.

"But you're not to interfere."

"Only if him try to kill you."

"Tonto!" There was an unfamiliar sharpness in the masked man's voice. "Put that knife away."

The Indian glanced at his tall friend. He saw that it was indeed a command. One of the few commands he had ever been given. Obediently, but unwillingly, he put the knife back in its sheath.



The Scene That Met the Lone Ranger's Eyes

Just ahead, a ribbon of light showed through a partly opened door. As they came nearer, they could hear Dan Slade's voice.

"There was a time," Slade said, "when I was pretty friendly with Gorman, but that was before he tried to cheat me."

The Lone Ranger peered through the opening in the door. Gorman sat cowering in a chair. Near him was a heavy oak table, and, across from this, sat Lem Loftus and his wife, Sara. On their faces the masked man saw an odd mixture of fear and hope.

Against the wall, a heavy gun held in his hand, stood the man the Lone Ranger had trailed so diligently—the man he had sworn to capture: Dan Slade! Though Slade addressed his remarks to Lem Loftus, he kept his gun pointed and his eyes fixed on the panic-stricken Gorman.

"Right now," he went on, "I'm a fugitive. I'm bein' hunted day an' night, for murder. But that's aside from the point. My conscience is clear. I ain't regrettin' a thing I ever done in all my life. But just the same I'm an outlaw, while that snake," he jabbed his gun toward

Gorman, "is protected by the same law that wants tuh hang me."

"But I can sleep at night, when I git the chance to," Slade snapped. "I ain't haunted by any conscience pricklin' at my soul. When I'm done fer, an' go tuh the next world, I'll git a square deal an' so'll you. You'll pay up there, fer all the cussedness that yuh showed in this life. Mebbe that don't bother you none now, but it will, blame soon."

Gorman risked a question.

"Wha . . . what're you goin' to do here?" he stammered.

"I risked my neck to come back here to see these two folks git a square deal. I'm back here to see some justice done."

"J-Justice?" echoed Gorman.

"That's what I said." He turned to Lem. "I know all about why yer bound to work fer Gorman. He gave you some cash, didn't he? Grub-staked you, ain't that right?"

Lem nodded.

"Then that cash was stolen, an' you couldn't work the claim. Lost the claim, came back, an'

had to work out what you owed this—this miser."

Lem nodded vigorously once more.

"He took, or lost, ten thousand dollars of my money," blurted Gorman.

"Gorman," barked Dan Slade, "yer a lyin', dirty rat."

"Did you count that dust or have it weighed or anything?" asked Dan of Lem.

"No," replied old Loftus. "I—I didn't have the chance. There was no way to weigh it."

"Just about what I thought. It was stolen from you before you had any chance to see how much he actually gave you. You looked on Gorman as the friend who'd grubstaked you, and you'd have taken his word for what he'd given you. Even if you'd had the chance to weigh it, it ain't likely you'd have done so."

"N-No, it—it isn't likely. I took his word for it."

"Why, you double-dealing son-of-a-mangy-coyote," snarled Dan at Gorman, who by now was deaf to hard names.

The Lone Ranger, still listening at the door, was more than ever impressed by Dan Slade. He was actually getting to like the young fugitive, and to dislike more and more the task of capturing him. As he watched Slade quiver with rage at the treatment given Lem Loftus, he said to himself:

"I—I just can't shoot that man. If I can't take him in alive, I—well, I can't take him in."

"Gorman!" Dan's voice barked like the report of a six-gun. "Just how much cash was really there?"

Gorman squirmed uneasily in his chair. He fidgeted, readjusted his weight. Then his collar seemed too tight, and he tucked his finger beneath it to pull it away from his throat.

Dan came to him, grabbed a handful of his shirt and shook him.

"I SAID, HOW MUCH!" He shook him again. "Answer me, you rat, and for once in your life, let's hear the truth."

"S-Slade," he stammered, "I—let's sort of talk things over . . ."

Dan's hands flashed up. He held his gun pointed straight at Gorman's head.

"I'm to hang anyway," he barked, "and one more murder won't make it any worse. They can't hang me twice."

"Don't shoot," begged Gorman.

Dan's voice reached a new peak.

"The truth," he almost screamed in his emotion. "I want the truth, or as sure as there's a sunrise tomorrow I'll drill you square between the eyes." His trigger-finger tensed.

The Lone Ranger drew his own gun. He wanted to prevent a murder, yet he desperately wanted to see Slade squeeze a confession from the scheming Ebenezer Gorman.

Gorman's eyes were riveted to Slade's gun. He saw the trigger go back slightly. Then he screamed in terror.

"Don't kill me, Slade, I'll tell!"

"How much was in that sack?"

"F-Four hundred dollars!"

"HOW MUCH?" thundered Dan.

"F-Four hundred dollars, that's the truth."

Dan Slade lowered his gun and, for the first time in weeks, he grinned.

Lem Loftus echoed Gorman's words in a hollow voice.

"You was made to think it was ten thousand, Loftus, and that's the amount you've been slayin' fer this polecat, tuh pay back. I guess you didn't savvy much about men or mines, or you'd know there was somethin' mighty funny about Gorman handin' out a sum like that."

"I—I believed what he told me," said old Lem in a dazed voice.

Sara could scarcely believe her ears. She couldn't bring herself to the realization that Gorman had been driving her and her husband like slaves to repay a debt that had never existed. Four hundred . . . ten thousand! Her mind was a jumble of large figures and she was only vaguely aware of what Dan Slade was saying.

"As I see it, Gorman, you owe these folks some cash—a lot of it!"

"No—no," objected Gorman, "I . . ."

"Shut up! I'm doin' the talkin' here an' all you do is obey orders, if you want to go on livin'. I figure you owe these two about two thousand dollars cash for the work they've done fer you."



Dan Fired Blindly Toward the Door

"T-Two thousand . . ."

"That's in round figures. Maybe it's more than that, but you'll settle fer two thousand, an' I reckon Loftus will call it square."

"I'll give 'em the house they're livin' in!"

"That shack ain't fit fer swine! They'll take the cash an' pronto!"

Lem finally found his voice and spoke haltingly.

"L-Look here, Mister, I . . . we . . . that is, if Mister Gorman is willin' tuh leave us free now . . ."

"It's out of your hands," snapped Dan Slade. "I aim to see that rat pay up."

At that moment, the confused old man, to whom this sudden wealth was coming, chanced to glance at the partly opened door. The Lone Ranger, keenly interested in seeing Slade do the very thing he had sought to do, did not realize that his masked face was seen until Lem shrieked a warning.

Dan whirled with lightning speed at Lem's shout, and saw him pointing to the door. Two guns blazed, Dan firing blindly toward the door, the Lone Ranger shooting with deadly accuracy because he had no choice!

CHAPTER VIII

The First Meeting

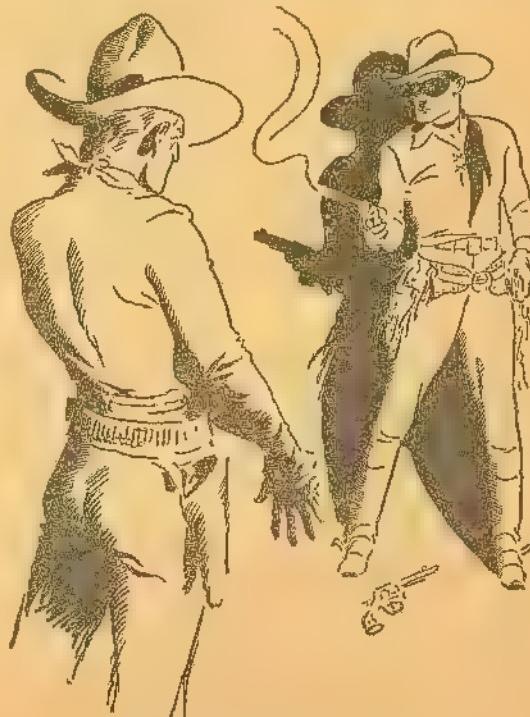
WITH THE roar of the Lone Ranger's gun, Dan Slade's weapon seemed to become a thing alive! It leaped from his extended hand, and spun in an arc through the air to land with a thud ten feet away. Dan gasped with the pain in his hand, as the shock of the bullet made itself felt. The door of the room burst wide, and the masked man stood framed in the doorway, a gun in each hand covering both Dan Slade and Ebenezer Gorman.

"Good work—good shooting!" cried Ebenezer Gorman. "He's an outlaw—shoot him down! Shoot him down and I'll reward you."

In his glee at what he thought would save him from Dan Slade's grim justice, Gorman was barely conscious of the fact that the man in the doorway wore a mask.

"You're covered," the masked man told Dan Slade; "don't try to reach for your other gun."

The tableau held for a brief instant in tense silence. Dan relaxed a little, and his shoulders



The Shot Knocked Dan's Gun From His Hand

slumped in disappointment.

"Wal," he finally drawled, "we sort of meet up with each other at last, don't we, Mister?"

The Lone Ranger nodded slowly.

"Not exactly face tuh face," Dan Slade went on, "bein' as you're masked, but I reckon this is just about as close as anyone has ever been to meetin' you face to face."

He was talking to fill time while his mind raced for some means to outwit the calm masked man who held those heavy guns so steady.

"I found," the deliberate voice of the Lone Ranger said, "your note."

"I knew you'd find it, but I figured you wouldn't be back here so soon. You must've been closer to me than I thought. I hoped I'd get finished up with what I wanted to do here, and get out on a fresh start. I mean just what that note said though, Mister. I'm not goin' to be taken back alive. In just about a minute, when we've finished gettin' acquainted, I'm goin' for my other gun, an' then you'd better snap a fast shot, an' make it hit true, because if you don't—"

Slade left his sentence unfinished, but there was no way to misunderstand his meaning.

Tonto came into the room, his face showing frank disgust at the manner in which Gorman revealed his pleasure at the turn of things. His yellow, misshapen teeth showed as Gorman laughed and chuckled on the verge of hysterics at Dan's capture.

"I don't want to shoot you," Dan told the other, "but it's that, or be shot, an' I don't hanker to get shot if I can help it. I ain't goin' back to stand trial. It's just the fact that I'm not guilty, an' I'll sure as thunder hang."

"I know, Dan, but you're going back, alive or dead."

The Lone Ranger spoke almost subconsciously. He, too, was thinking fast.

"Just one thing that disappoints me all to the dickens," muttered Slade. "I hate to go an' feel that this polecat, meanin' Ebenezer Gorman there, that's chatterin' like a magpie, will be able to go right on with his robbin' of these folks."

"How did you know about Gorman and the

swindle he's been carrying on?"

"Aw, I've known the rat for years: I knew the breed he hired to rob Lem Loftus, but it wasn't until I came through here, this trip, that I saw how he was treatin' them, an' what deviltry was behind that robbery. I should have known better than to get soft-hearted an' come back here. Now we've got to shoot it out."

"You came back here, Dan," said the masked man, "to see certain things done for Lem and Sara Loftus."

Dan nodded.

"Perhaps those things will still be done."

The Lone Ranger turned his attention to Gorman.

"You," he said distinctly, "are a crook."

"But that man is an outlaw. He's wanted for murder. I demand that you take him back!"

"Be quiet!" snapped the Lone Ranger. "You have done your best to work these people to death. You're as much of a killer as any man, perhaps more of a killer than Slade. You've tried to rob them of the last of their strength, instead of hiring laborers at fair wages." The Lone Ranger raised his voice a trifle. "Gorman, you PAY UP!"

Dan Slade, for the first time in many days, actually smiled, and for that brief instant his face lost its hard, grim lines, and once again was boyish.

"Thanks, for that," he beamed. "Lone Ranger, thanks for that."

Gorman began to object, but the masked man silenced him with a nudge from one of the guns.

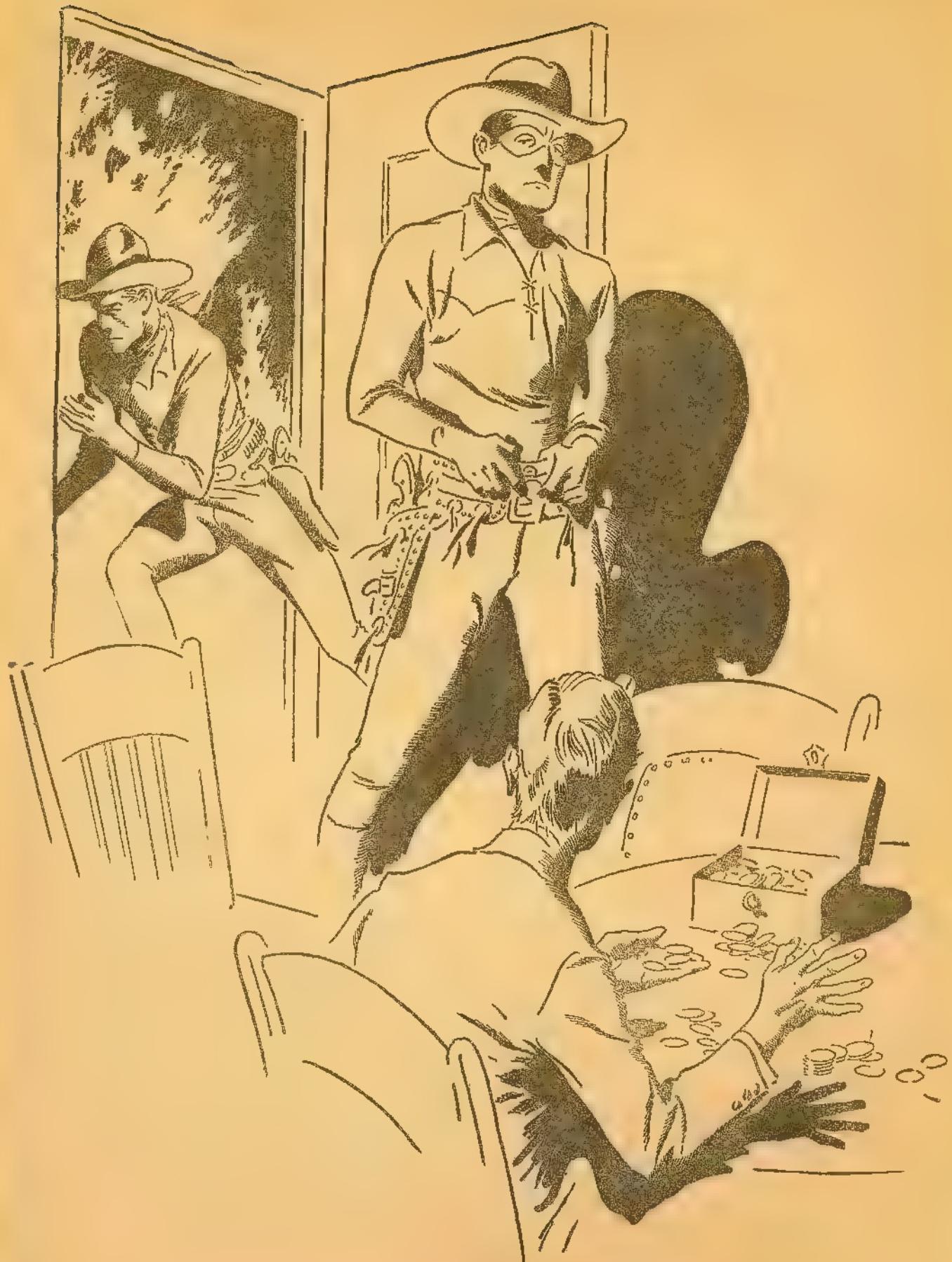
"Get going," he said, "and count out that cash. I'll finish what Dan Slade started."

The voice of the Lone Ranger left no room for argument.

Gorman saw the futility of further talk, and with his hands trembling, he opened the tin box.

"Keep an eye on him, Tonto," the Lone Ranger told his Indian ally. Then he turned to Slade. "You came back here, Slade," he said, "feeling pretty certain it meant your capture, just to help these people, didn't you?"

"Well, I had an idea I might be able to get away before you got to me. Reckon I ain't the



As Silently as a Shadow, Dan Slade Slipped out Through the Door

first man to go down because he underestimated those that were against him. I guess I just took one too many chances." He paused, his eyes closed slightly, and his voice was slower when he spoke again. "I'm aimin' to take just one more chance, Mister. I told you what that chance was goin' to be."

The Lone Ranger studied Dan Slade for a moment.

"You came back here, Slade," he said, "to do a thing that I myself wanted to do. You came back to help these two people."

"What of it?"

"There have been several times in my life when a certain code of my own has made my work lots harder. If you hadn't returned, you'd have been on the trail right now. I might have caught up with you, and on the other hand, I might not have. I can't take you in, because you came back to help bring these people justice."

"Just what are you gittin' at?" he asked the masked man.

"It's going to take Gorman quite a while to count out two thousand dollars at the rate he's going. I'm not leaving here until he's finished. Perhaps, while I am watching him, you could slip out the door so quietly that neither Tonto nor I would hear you. If you could manage that, it would give you the chance to make a fresh start before we take up your trail again."

Again Gorman stopped his counting, but changed his mind when he felt Tonto's knife prick his flesh through the vest and shirt he wore. He went on counting.

"Five-fifty, five-sixty, five-seventy—"

The Lone Ranger deliberately turned his back on Dan Slade, holstered both his guns, and watched Ebenezer Gorman as he continued counting money.

Dan Slade understood. As silently as a shadow, he slipped through the door, and once outside hurried to the nearest window. One of his guns, the one smashed by the Lone Ranger's bullet, was on the floor inside the cabin. He held the other in his hand—held it leveled at the broad back of the Lone Ranger. One shot was all it would require. One quick bullet, and the only

man alive who would be likely to track him down, would be no longer on his trail. One bullet, to end forever the fear of being captured and taken back to Texas to hang for a crime of which he was innocent.

But Dan Slade could not fire that shot. He shook his head, holstered his pistol, sought out his horse, and rode away.

Tonto grinned broadly as the sound of a horse's hoofs, receding, reached his ears. A trace of a grim smile showed at the corners of the masked man's mouth.

"Now," he said to Tonto, "we'll have to start our trail all over again. But we couldn't take Dan Slade in this time! The next time we meet, things will be different."

Gorman added the last gold coin to the pile and muttered, "Two thousand dollars." His face was pale, and went even paler as he saw his precious hoard scooped up, tied in a handkerchief by the Lone Ranger and handed to the happy and amazed old couple.

Then Ebenezer Gorman, overcome by the strain, slumped unconscious in his chair.

CHAPTER IX

The House on the Mountain

LONG days and nights in the saddle, with barely enough time taken to eat and sleep, stretched into a fortnight after the Lone Ranger and Tonto left Goose River to follow the new trail of Dan Slade.

Daily the respect the Lone Ranger had for the young outlaw increased, as he saw the valiant fight for freedom. The small campfires told Tonto a great deal as he and the masked man came upon them. Slade was not only traveling fast, but living on a minimum of food. Yet, despite his eagerness to get away, the Lone Ranger noticed that Slade gave his horse sufficient time to graze and drink.

The terrain was mountainous now, and the going became harder all the time. The pledge of the Lone Ranger to capture Dan Slade was



"Look-um There," Tonto Muttered, Reining up His Horse

becoming more distasteful all the time. Yet his word had been given, and could not be recalled.

The trail finally led along the crest of a range of mountains. The footing was treacherous for Silver and the Paint Horse Tonto rode. Sandy shale slipped from beneath the horse's hoofs to slide into the valley on the west.

Tonto, leading the way, reined up his horse.

"Look-um there," he muttered, pointing to the ground on his left.

The masked man saw a place where Slade's horse had almost slid into the valley. The silt and loose rock was gullied from the frantic pawing of the horse to keep its footing and regain the ridge. The valley at the bottom of the steep slope was arid, barren and desolate in the scorching sunlight.

"Maybe better turn-um back," muttered the Indian, in a last feeble effort to divert the masked man from his chase.

The tall man shook his head slowly.

"Where Dan Slade went," he said, "we can

go. These people—the friends he knows—live just beyond and after all his efforts to throw us off his trail, that seems to be the place he's heading for."

The Lone Ranger squinted his eyes behind the slits of his mask, trying to discern some sign of a house in the distance. Somewhere not very far ahead, he knew, Dan Slade rode.

For another quarter of an hour, the two rode on in silence. Then the masked man called out suddenly, "Wait, Tonto! I see the house ahead. Let me take the lead."

Unwillingly, Tonto let the tall white man go by him and take the lead in the approach to the small weather-beaten cottage, outlined against the sky on the east side of the mountain, far off in the distance.

Martha Westerly was rocking in her favorite chair, paying only scant attention to the tune her daughter, Betsy, played on the guitar. The old woman's eyes were fastened on a small cross not far from the house. She saw it through the open



Betsy

window, and remembered the time, five years before, when she had fashioned it with Juan's help. She recalled the tears that moistened the boy's eyes when her husband was finally put to rest as Juan's parents had been. She remembered her promise to Juan that they would never leave this place on the mountain.

Life here had been hard these past years, but it might have been much harder had it not been for the constant efforts of Juan Riviera. The slim, dark-haired, olive-skinned lad was a dynamo of energy. Up before the sun, he worked till long after dark, gathering whatever he could find to serve as fuel, tramping long miles to a stream where there were fish, gathering berries, hunting small game, and slaving in the scorching sun to grow a meager supply of vegetables.

Martha understood the reason: Juan wanted to remain here near his parents. He wanted Martha and Betsy to be contented here. Yet, today, a thought that had kept recurring to her time and time again could not be driven from her mind. It wasn't fair to Betsy! The girl had grown to womanhood and deserved more of life than to live in almost solitary isolation.

"Betsy!" she called suddenly.

Betsy stopped playing in the middle of a tune,

"Do you want to leave here an' go to Goose River or some place where there's folks about?"

"L-Leave here?" The cornflower-colored eyes of the girl were wide with amazement. She did not realize that the question came as a result of many weeks of consideration. "Y-You mean for a visit?"

"For good an' all!"

"B-But golly, Mother, I never even thought of that!"

For a moment Betsy looked at her mother, a woman of hardy pioneer stock.

"Are you serious, Mother, or are you just foolin'?"

"Never more serious in my life."

A worried look came into the face of the girl.

"But, Mother, how would Dan Slade find us?"

"Dan Slade!" exploded the older woman. "What makes you think he'll be huntin' fer you?"

"He said he'd come back some day."

"An' you believed it?"

"Of course I did. Why would he say that if he didn't mean it?"

"By darn, you DO need to git around an' meet some men so's you'll learn not to take everything they say so serious! It's more'n a year since you last seen him, ain't it?"

"Y-Yes," the girl admitted.

"An' you still thinkin' he'll come back! Thunderation, girl, get that notion out'n yer head. Likely he's settled down on a Texas ranch with a wife an' house an' young-un by this time. That's where he was headin', wasn't it?"

"Y-Yes, but he was goin' to join the Texas Rangers. Then he was goin' to come back after he'd made a mark in the world. I—I never told you, Mother, b-but . . ." Betsy crimsoned as she went on, "We—we are goin' to get married."

The sound of a horse's hoofs came from outside. Martha ceased her rocking to listen more intently.

"Tain't Juan," she decided. "That lame Mexican plug of his never sounded like that, an' . . ."

The door burst open and Betsy called exultantly, "Dan!"

Martha turned. Much to her surprise it was actually Dan Slade who stood there.

"Wal, look who's here!"

"Betsy, honey . . . !" exclaimed Dan Slade.

He advanced a pace toward the girl, and then halted, dropping his partly outstretched arms at his sides.

"So you come back, eh, Dan'l?" greeted Martha Westerly. "What happened? Couldn't yuh git intuh them Ranger fellers' organization?"

"There's a lot that's happened, Ma'am."

"Main thing is," went on Dan, "I'm bein' hunted by the law!" He swung to Betsy. "You've got to take my word for it, Betsy, I swear to you, I never done a thing that I'm accused of. They're huntin' me in Texas for a murder I didn't do. But I can't prove I'm innocent. I'll hang if I'm caught, an' I don't aim to get caught."

"Texas is plenty far from here," observed Martha.

"But the Lone Ranger ain't. He's right on my heels, an' he'll stay till he overtakes me or gets lost somewhere in the mountains."

"I'm headin' north from here, into the badlands. Maybe I can shake him off my trail when I get there. Betsy, I had to see you an' tell you that I ain't forgot what I promised. Have you?"

"N-No, Dan, b-but I can't believe that you're an outlaw!"

"I'm not," snapped Dan. "I'm hunted, but I'm innocent. Do you believe me, Betsy?"

"I do," replied the girl emphatically.

"I reckon that goes fer me, too, Dan Slade," chimed in her mother. "Betsy told me you'd be back an' I had doubts as to that, but I don't think you got killer blood in yuh. If yuh had, you'd meet an' drop this Lone Ranger you speak of. Who the heck is he?"

"Don't nobody know his name. He's masked, an' he's the finest man that ever lived. I don't want to kill him, but I got a right to live! That's why I don't want to meet him. Betsy, if you still mean what you said a year ago, wait fer me. I swear that some day I'll come back for yuh!"

"Dan," burst out the girl, "I'll go with yuh!"

"Steady, Betsy. Steady, honey," admonished Dan Slade. "I wouldn't ask no woman to share

the life I'll have tuh lead until I find some place that's safe. Just you wait, wait fer me. I promise if I live, I'll come back."

CHAPTER X

Ambushed

FROM Martha Westerly, Dan Slade secured a supply of food, enough to last him for several days, and for over a week if he went on reduced rations. He stowed the supplies in his saddle bags and covered them with waterproof tarpaulin. He refused the offer of another horse, preferring to keep his tired but game companion which he understood so well.

Jerking the last knot tight, Dan Slade turned to Ma Westerly, who advanced to grip his extended hand.

"Thanks," he said, "for all you've done for me. If I live long enough, I'll sure repay you, or try my level best to, anyhow."

"Nonsense," retorted the woman. "You just travel fast an' keep goin'. The best of luck to you."

Then Dan turned to Betsy.

"If I live," he told the girl, "I'll be back."



"If I Live," Dan Said, "I'll Be Back."

"Dan, if—if you can't come back, just send me word. You can get word to me somehow. Just let me know where you're in hidin', an' if you want me to, I'll come an' meet you."

Dan did not speak again. He turned quickly, swung to the saddle, and rode off without a backward glance. If his eyes and mind had not been so filled with the girl he loved, he might have noticed the expression on the thin face of the hot-tempered Spanish youth, Juan. Juan thought as much of Dan Slade as he might have thought of his own brother. Juan adored Betsy and her mother. They were sister and mother to him. The mere fact that Dan Slade was a friend of theirs, made Dan a friend of Juan Rivera. Juan would willingly, even gladly, have given his life for the Westerlys; now he felt obligated to do as much for Dan Slade.

Dan did not see the expression that smouldered in Juan's eyes; he did not notice how Juan stepped inside the house. Had Dan Slade looked back, to wave a farewell to Betsy, he might have seen Juan coming from the house, gripping a long rifle—but Dan Slade did not look back.

Juan walked away, the rifle in his hands, and murder burning in his eyes.

The last quarter mile of Dan's track before reaching the Westerly place was the most hazardous part of the entire journey. Even the sure-footed Silver had difficulty in negotiating the crest. This was the stretch of ground that had already caused three horsemen to lose their lives, by falling down the steep side of the mountain.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto were not yet in sight of the Westerly house, but they knew that it was just ahead. It was there that the masked man expected to find Dan Slade.

"I think we're going to have the showdown now," he told Tonto. "We'll stop here for just a minute."

"Tonto," he said, "I want you to make one promise to me."

"What that?" asked the Indian.

"Dan Slade is a man. He proved that when he went back to help the Loftuses. He'll fight fair, and we want to do the same. If you help

me, it will make uneven odds. I don't want it to be two men against one. This is between Dan Slade and myself, and you're not to take part in it! Promise that you won't."

Tonto studied his friend's face a moment longer. He saw that the Lone Ranger had never been more sincere in what he said. Then the Indian nodded slowly.

"Me promise!"

The Lone Ranger did not thank Tonto for that promise. Words of thanks were empty between these two. Each one understood the other so well that nothing needed to be said. He simply gripped the hard arm of Tonto, and squeezed it, a gesture of understanding between two staunch friends.

Just as the Lone Ranger was about to nudge Silver with his heels, a sudden shot split the silence. It was the crack of a rifle that shattered the air and echoed from the hills.

The same thought flashed through the minds of both men. Dan Slade must have dry-gulched them. They saw where the bullet struck; a geyser of shale sprang up from the ground. The masked man snatched his guns, and tried to see where the shot was fired from. Tonto apparently had seen. He was already in action, heeling his horse ahead toward some distant scrubby bushes, with no thought of the danger to himself.

The Lone Ranger shouted to halt his friend. But Tonto was not to be stopped. Two against one was all right, the Indian felt, if the one was willing to fire from ambush. The rifle cracked a second time—a puff of smoke came from behind the bushes toward which Tonto sped. The masked man saw Tonto throw both arms high into the air, and spin crazily from the saddle to sprawl on the ground.

Forgetting the uncertain footing, the sliding shale, and the hazard of the mountainside, the Lone Ranger jerked his own big stallion around, trying to wheel him into action. This instant of forgetfulness proved to be his undoing. Silver wheeled too suddenly, his hoofs slipped on the treacherous silt, and the big white stallion, with its rider, plunged to the ground.



The Lone Ranger Tried Desperately to Help the Horse Regain Its Footing

CHAPTER XI

The Landslide

THE Lone Ranger grabbed at Silver's white mane with his right hand, trying desperately to help the horse regain its footing, but the effort was futile. There was no footing to be had on the steep slope. The four legs shot out as the horse spilled to its side and started rolling.

The masked man had a hard time freeing himself from the stirrups to escape a broken leg—then he too began to slide.

The Lone Ranger tried to dig his heels into the silt and brace himself, but that was impossible. Shale, sand and stones came down on top of him, and sent him spilling, clawing, rolling downhill with the rocks. His feet and hands, as he clawed, sank deep in the soft stuff. He felt the sand gripping him, pulling him on down.

Then a rock, rolling downhill on the top of the loose mass, struck him a glancing blow, and stunned him. He was only barely conscious now, but his will to keep fighting kept him struggling futilely. When he tried to raise his arms to protect his head from the pelting stones, he found he could not move them. They seemed lifeless, frozen to his sides.

At last the downward movement seemed to slacken. Presently, the masked man's stunned senses brought him the realization that he was no longer sailing downhill. He had been stopped by a sturdy stump of a lightning-blasted tree. But new horror was upon him instantly. The shale and sand was still pouring down, piling up against him. Already buried to his hips, in an upright position, he saw that he was helpless to escape. Again he tried to lift his bruised and aching arms, but had not the strength to move them.

Then all feeling of pain left him. There was every possibility that he would be buried alive, but somehow it did not seem so awful as it had a little while ago. The mountain seemed to be whirling in dizzy circles. Trees, rocks, the crest above and valley below, all became a mass of giddy figures without definite shape or form.

Then, for the masked man, the world went black. His head dropped forward, and he felt himself sinking—sinking into a black void that had no bottom.

Tonto lay unconscious for several moments after spilling from his Paint Horse. When he first realized that he was still alive, a menacing rumble filled his ears. It sounded a little like thunder—yet it was nearer, and the ground itself seemed to tremble. He thought, at first, the sound was just a figment of his imagination, the result of a hard blow on the head. But as his brain became more clear, he knew otherwise. The giddiness was leaving him, but each breath he took made his chest hurt frightfully. He opened his eyes, and touched his chest with his fingers. They felt something warm, slightly sticky. Wounded, but still alive, he thought.

The rumbling sound increased, and then began to fade out. Tonto closed his eyes again, rested a little, and then re-opened them, as he heard the voice of a man close by.

"Make a single move," the strange voice said, "and I will shoot you again. This time, I will shoot, not to wound, but to kill."

Tonto saw a rifle first of all. The muzzle was pointed directly at him, less than a foot from his face. Over the sights of the long, black weapon, the Indian saw a pair of black eyes, squinting as they looked at him.

"Who — — you?" inquired the Indian, still supine on the ground.

"My name is of no importance. Those who count are my friend, and the girl he loves. You will make no further move to capture them, or you will not live."

"Your friend," murmured Tonto, speaking with an effort, "him name Dan Slade?"

Juan Riviera nodded, lowering the gun a little.

"You, I have captured. Your friend with the white horse has gone in the landslide. He will ride no more to menace my friend. If only my first shot had killed you, it would have been so much easier. Now I find you a wounded man, and I cannot bring myself to fire a second shot to kill you."

Juan went on bemoaning the fact that his first

shot had not permanently disposed of Tonto, but the Indian paid no attention to what was being said. His mind was filled with the stunning news about the landslide.

LANDSLIDE!

So that was what the Indian had heard! His friend, the masked heroic figure of the west, THE LONE RANGER, was gone! Dead! Perhaps buried under tons of rock by this time. And Silver! What of the mighty stallion? And where was his own Paint Horse, Scout?

A dozen questions came to Tonto's mind, yet none of them were important. Even his own wound was forgotten, the pain in his chest ignored. The Lone Ranger was gone!

"I do not think your wound is serious, so I must take no chances. I must tie you." Juan spoke, not knowing that Tonto heard nothing of what he said.

Tonto did observe that it was not Dan Slade who had fired that shot from ambush. The Lone Ranger had been right in his appraisal of the young outlaw. Slade perhaps knew nothing of the dry-gulching. Yet, and Tonto felt bitter when he thought of it, it did not matter who fired the shot, or caused it to be fired. The Lone Ranger was gone!

The Indian made no attempt to resist the efforts of Juan to bind his wrists together. The young Spaniard fumbled clumsily with the lashings, but managed to do an effective job of tying them and then did likewise to the ankles of the Indian.

A clatter of approaching hoofs announced a new arrival. From where he was, Tonto could not see who came, and for a moment he felt a thrill surge through his veins, but it was gone in an instant. That was not the hoofbeat that he knew so well.

It was Dan Slade who rode close, and leaped from the saddle. Dan took in the situation at a glance. His voice rang with fury as he shouted at the surprised Juan Riviera:

"What have you done?"

Juan stammered explanations, doing his best to answer the questions that Dan hammered at him so relentlessly.



"TALK! Where Is That Masked Man?"

Dan Demanded

"And what about the man?"

"Amigo," faltered the now frightened youth, "I only do it to help you."

Dan stepped close, disregarding Tonto, who by this time had struggled to a sitting posture, and grabbed Juan's thin arms in his strong young fists!

"TALK!" he barked. "Where is that masked man?"

Juan dropped his rifle, and tried to lift his hands to plead with Dan Slade.

"I only do it because of you and the Senorita. I hear you say that some day these men will capture you. That is not right. None of us wish it so. Now it will never happen. This one is wounded—"

Dan ripped out a cry that made Juan quail and tremble.

"Blast you," he finished. "I heard that shot and landslide, and rode back to see what happened! Did the Lone Ranger get caught in the slide?"

"Madre Mio," sobbed Juan, "I mean no harm, but that is what has happened. He is somewhere down there."

Dan dropped the Spaniard's arms.

"Give that redskin's wound attention," he com-

manded. "Get him to the house and have Betsy an' her ma clean and dress it. I'll have a look at it when I get back."

With that Dan left and went to the top of the slope.

Something urged him forward. He felt certain that no human being could survive a landslide on that treacherous slope. Yet he felt if there was a spark of life remaining in the cruelly battered body of the Lone Ranger, he must give aid.

The sheer slope spread out below Dan Slade. He could not go down there and keep his footing. Yet he had to make the descent. The Lone Ranger was down below. He noticed stunted trees and shrubs that dotted the slope—trees and shrubs anchored by such tenacious roots that even the landslide could not dislodge them. He charted for himself a course, from one of these to the next, and then to the next, and so on. If he could follow that course, stopping at intervals, to prevent gaining too great a momentum, he might make the grade.

He sat down, extending his legs before him, with his hands bracing him at each side. Shoving himself ahead, he began sliding toward the first of the planned stopping points. He reached the first dwarfed tree in safety.

"So far so good," he muttered, and started on his next slide.

In this way, by short stages, he made his way toward the bottom of the mountain, pausing at each stop to study the hill ahead most carefully, looking for some sign of the Lone Ranger.

CHAPTER XII

The Second Meeting

THE LONE RANGER regained his senses with the sun beating down on his unprotected head. Buried almost to the shoulders as he was, he found himself unable to move, except from the shoulders up. He was facing along the side of the mountain.

His buried arms were held in a hard grip by

the heavy gravel, and he could not extricate them. Even with his full strength, he would not have been able to draw them from their pockets in the shale, and now, weak as he was, it was a hopeless task.

His thoughts turned to Tonto, and he wondered if his faithful Indian companion was alive or dead. He had no way of telling. The last he had seen of Tonto, he was motionless, knocked from the saddle by a bullet fired from ambush.

Next he thought of Silver, his companion in so many dangerous adventures and narrow escapes. He wondered if Silver had lived through the landslide, only to die in pain perhaps with broken bones, somewhere down below. The sun would be the greatest enemy, then hunger and thirst would become allies, and the three would soon snap the sanity of a man in the masked man's position. He wondered, idly, how long it would be before the end, and how the end would come. He held no hope of rescue.

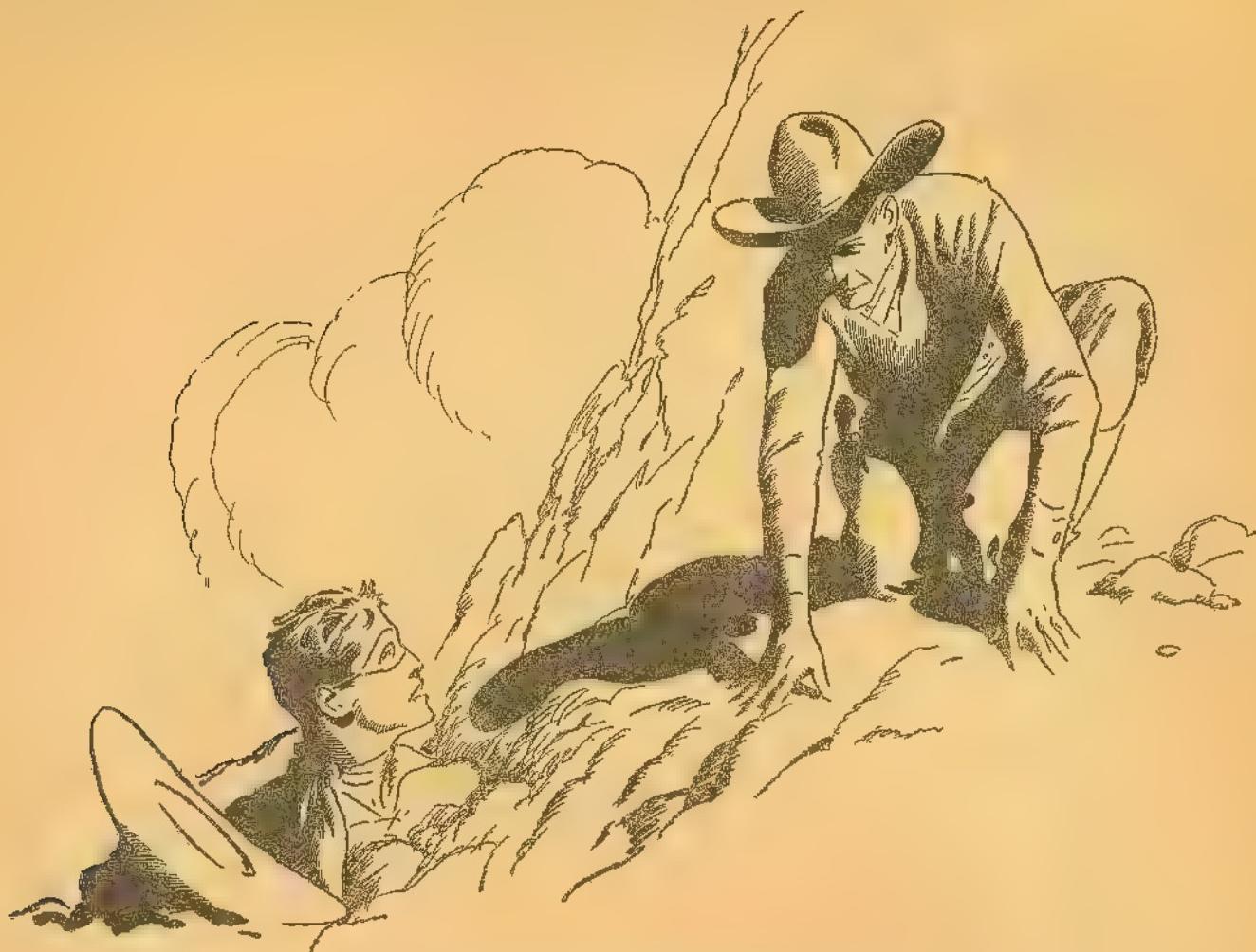
He heard the sound of sliding shale again—an awful sound to one who had just come through the harrowing experience he had had. He waited, expecting any moment to hear the landslide start again. Then the sliding stopped.

It struck him as curious. More curious, when it began a second time. Small stones rolled down the hill, and pebbles came close to him, but they did not touch him. He tried to turn, to see the cause of the slide, but could not turn his head quite far enough. The sliding stopped, a pause, and then again it started. Curiosity dulled the pain of his bruises. He tried to turn, squirmed a bit, and realized once more how firmly imbedded he was. And then he heard a voice.

"Hello there!"

The voice had a familiar ring. It sounded like that of Dan Slade, but surely Dan Slade would not be here! And yet he was! Dan struggled to his feet, as he came into the scope of the Lone Ranger's vision. Briefly he explained why he had returned, on hearing the rifle shot, and the slide that followed it.

"It's not so much of a slope here," he explained. "You're almost at the bottom of the mountain. The valley's just a ways ahead."



The Lone Ranger Heard a Voice: "Hello There!" It Said

The masked man asked the question that was foremost in his mind.

"Tonto, what of him?"

"He's alive."

"Badly wounded?"

"He took the bullet in the chest. I guess he's hurt sort of painful, but not what you'd call serious. Betsy and her ma can patch him up so he'll be as good as new."

The Lone Ranger breathed a silent prayer of thanks at this news. Then he asked about his horse.

"Yer horse come through the slide all right. He sure must be a tough one. I see him at the bottom, in the valley."

"Standing?"

"Yep, he's standin' all right, on all fours. Walks with a little limp, but there's no broken bones. I

wouldn't say the horse was hurt hardly at all. In fact, it looks like you're the one that's got the worst of it, an' you sure got in plenty deep."

The Lone Ranger then realized for the first time that his mask was still in place. He could feel it on the bridge of his nose. He did not think for a moment that Dan Slade would offer to help him from his place of imprisonment. That was not the way men played the game of life and death in the West. Dan would not have PUT him in his position, but having found him there, there was little else for Dan to do but thank the Fate that gave him a new lease on life, and ride away, perhaps taking Silver along with him.

Dan Slade spoke again.

"This," the outlaw said, placing his hands on his lean hips, "looks like the end of the trail a' far as you're concerned." He tried to make his voice



"Reckon I'd Have to Give You a Mercy Bullet."

sound hard, but there was a trace of emotion that was not lost on the Lone Ranger. "Tell me this, stranger, have yuh got any broken bones you know about?"

"No."

"That's good. I'd hate tuh think of a man there as you are, with the sufferin' a broken leg or arm might cause him. Reckon if you had that sort of thing, I'd have to give you a mercy bullet, an' perhaps then I'd feel sort of justified in shootin' yuh. As it is, I reckon the only thing fer me tuh do is try tuh git back tuh the top of the mountain, an' shove on!"

"That would be the best way to get me off your trail, Slade."

"There's a few things I oughta tell you first. I—I sort of hate to have you git the wrong idea about things. It wasn't me that fired that rifle."

"I gathered as much from what you said."

"It was Juan Riviera, an' he done it without my knowing anything about it. He ain't a bad kid, he just done it because he thought he'd be helpin' me!"

"Your friends would go through a lot for you, Slade."

Dan Slade nodded slowly. He squatted on the ground, so he could look at the masked man's face without having to look down. He picked up a pebble and tossed it to one side. Then he straightened again, and walked gingerly on the shale to get the masked man's hat. This he put on the Lone Ranger's head.

"Thanks," said the Lone Ranger shortly.

"Sun's sort of hard on the eyes," returned Dan Slade. He squatted again, loath to leave the Lone Ranger as he was. "Listen here," he said suddenly, "the last time we met, you gave me a head start, before you took up the trail again."

"And very nearly lost your trail because of it!" The Lone Ranger's strength had returned enough to restore vigor to his voice. "I shouldn't have done that, Slade! I made a vow that I would take you back to Texas, if I could, and I'm going to keep that pledge!"

"I know."

"Don't think that you can persuade me to abandon my purpose, by offering to save my life now. If I get out of here, whether it's through your help, or help of someone else, I'm going to keep after you!"

Dan Slade sighed deeply. He tossed more pebbles to one side, while he looked at the ground.

"Who else," he muttered, "besides you an' Tonto, knows that I came this way?"

"No one," replied the Lone Ranger.

"That's what I thought." Slade met the eyes behind the mask. "If you an' Tonto die, I could stay right here, marry Betsy an' settle down! No one up here is interested in arrestin' me an' sendin' me back to Texas. The folks around here are friends of mine. They'd KILL for me!"

"That's been proved."

"I didn't commit a crime!" Dan spoke fast now, emotion pitching his voice a little higher than was usual. "I didn't kill that Texas Ranger—it was all a mistake! Why should they want tuh hang me for a murder I didn't do? I'm innocent, but I wouldn't stand a chance, if I went on trial."

He paused, breathing heavily.

"I'm not the one to decide on your guilt, Dan."

"There ain't no guilt, as far as I'm concerned! It was Durango, that outlaw that killed the Texas Ranger! Not me! I never killed a man in my life! I—I've been livin' in misery for the past weeks, thinkin' the day might come when I'd have to kill YOU, an' I didn't want to do it. If it was you or me, perhaps I could, but—but I didn't want to be a murderer, don't you see?"

He paused for breath and then went on, speaking rapidly, trying to unburden his very soul to the man who was before him, helpless in shale up to his shoulders.

"Why should I help you now? I didn't put you there. It wasn't through me you got into that shale! If I help you, you'll just start houndin' me again. I'll have to leave here, go back to Texas, stand trial, then hang. All in the world I've got to do, to be safe from now on, is to leave you where you are." He rose to his feet, tugged at his belt, and pulled his hat low on his forehead. "That's all I've got tuh do. Just leave you there!"

"Then why don't you start, Slade? You're perfectly right. All in the world you have to do, to be free, is to walk away from here, and leave me!"

Again Dan Slade looked down, and kicked at the shale with his boot.

"What," he inquired, "if I was to dig you out of there?"

"I'd try and take you back to Texas," was the sharp reply, "and furthermore, it will be DEAD OR ALIVE."

Dan Slade's face fell.

"That's what I thought," he said.

"You're fighting against yourself, Slade. You know your freedom can be secured only by leaving me here, but you haven't the courage to do it! You're afraid of what your conscience would do to you for the rest of your life! You haven't the courage to go away from here, and leave me like this!"

Dan looked surprised.

"But you're the only man in the world that stands between me an' the girl I love, the only man in the world that can take me back to Texas!"

"Then don't take chances," snapped the masked man. "Get out of here while you have the opportunity! Perhaps, while I'm helpless, you'd better snatch away my mask. There will be a lot of people who will be interested in what you can tell them about my face."

"I ain't wantin' tuh unmask yuh. I wouldn't take that advantage of yuh."

"But you won't want to remember me, MASKED, will you, Slade?" Dan was trembling with emotion as the Lone Ranger spoke. "Sometime, someone may find me here, and they might find the mask, and think that I was an outlaw. I wouldn't like that."

"WAIT!" shrilled Slade.

"YOU wouldn't leave me there, if things was just reversed. Maybe you're the man tuh send me tuh hang in Texas, but blast it all," Dan paused, "you're a MAN. You're the sort of man I wanted tuh be. The sort of man I started out tuh be, when I tried tuh join the Rangers! I went back tuh Gorman's tuh help them, because I thought it was the sort of thing the Lone Ranger would've done! I can't leave yuh there!"

He threw aside his vest and hat, bent down and started scooping at the soft shale with his hands.

"I'm goin' tuh git yuh loose from there, an' before yuh start out after me, you'll have tuh git yer hoss. Then you'll have tuh find the trail up the side of this mountain. I KNOW the trail an' my hoss is waitin' right above. That'll give me a head start. Enough of a start! When I leave, I'll be runnin' downhill."

He scooped some more.

"Runnin' down hill, an' if yuh take a shot at me, you'll have tuh shoot me in the back. Yuh won't do that. You're not the one tuh shoot a man in the back. Not even ME! I'll git yuh out, an' git a start, but remember this, Lone Ranger . . ."

Dan stopped scooping, and pointed his next remark.

"Remember this! The next time we meet, it's you or me! D' you savvy that? YOU OR ME! AN' HEAVEN HELP US BOTH!"



Dan Attempted to Make Friends Without Arousing Suspicion

CHAPTER XIII

Dan Slade's Story

DAN SLADE did not trust himself to go back up the mountain to borrow a spade from the Westerlys. He was afraid that once away from the masked man, he might yield to the pleadings of Juan, Betsy, and the mother of the girl he loved, and leave the Lone Ranger where he was, to die. He did not want the haunting memory of the masked man, as he would always picture him, in his present helpless position.

He scooped and dug with his bare hands. Tough as they were, from a life in the open, doing the chores of a man of the West, they were soon torn and bleeding from the stones. The nails of his fingers became broken, and the gravel

dug into the tender flesh around the base of the nails, but he dug on. While he worked, throwing handfuls of the sand and shale to one side, he explained just how it happened that he had become an outlaw. His story was one that interested the Lone Ranger keenly.

It seemed that Dan Slade wanted above all else to become a Texas Ranger. That was his ambition, and the end toward which he had practiced daily with a gun in each hand, or with a rope. He was under the usual height and weight, and this made him all the more determined to prove himself worthy of the Texas Ranger's badge.

He joined the Army and served with credit, fighting admirably in several skirmishes with Indians. He won his spurs. Then, armed with a letter from his Commandant, he went to Captain Scarsdale of the Texas Rangers, a former

Army man himself. Scarsdale listened to the youth, and studied the boyish, happy-go-lucky countenance. Scarsdale doubted that Dan Slade had the grim severity of manner that marked the other Texas Rangers. He wanted proof that Dan was worthy of the membership he sought.

Dan begged and pleaded with Captain Scarsdale, and was told to go back to the Army, to re-enlist and get a few more years on his shoulders, get a little more experience in battle—then come back again. But Dan Slade was stubborn! He did not want the Army life. He wanted to become a Texas Ranger. His enthusiasm brought a little smile to Captain Scarsdale's rugged face.

"Perhaps," the captain finally said, "your appearance might prove worth while after all. There's one particular outlaw that we want mighty bad, and so far we haven't been able to get him. Maybe if you leave here, and pose as an outlaw, you can get close to the quarter-breed we want, and lead him into a trap."

It was a challenge to Dan Slade and he accepted it eagerly! The two made plans. Scarsdale told about Durango. The man was a powerful giant, a quarter-breed, who was wanted in several states for every crime on the record. Durango would stop at nothing.

Durango was no easy man to trap. The plans made were secret, none but Captain Scarsdale and Dan knew about them.

So Dan finally located the moron and made friends with him. It was then that Brealt, a hard-faced ranger, and his partner surprised the two men and made them prisoners.

When Dan came to this part of the narrative, his voice trembled slightly. He told the Lone Ranger of the happiness that had filled his heart, and the anticipation he had had, of tiding back to Betsy Westerly, with the news that he had arrived at the goal he had set for himself. A Texas Ranger . . . full-fledged . . . and after a few years . . . he could be elected Sheriff of some small community, then marry Betsy and settle down.

It seemed that Brealt watched Dan Slade and Durango like a hawk. Dan slept a little; when night came on. When he awoke, Brealt was still sitting, watching his every move.

"Awake at last, eh?" muttered the Texas Ranger.

Dan Slade nodded and asked about Durango.

"He came awake at sunup, tried to get loose from the ropes, saw it warn't no use, and' rolled over and went to sleep again."

"I don't suppose," he asked, "that Captain Scarsdale will be comin' here?"

"Nope!" replied the Ranger shortly.

With that he turned away from Dan Slade.

"Hold on!" called the inwardly happy youth, "wait a minute, Brealt. I got somethin' to say to you!"

Brealt wheeled and came back. He stood close by Dan Slade, and tossed a verbal bombshell when he spoke.

"Look here, I don't know whether you're tryin' to be funny, when you speak about Captain Scarsdale, or what your idea is, but I don't like it, savvy? The Captain was the squarest man that ever lived!"

"Was?" echoed Dan Slade.

"He was killed last week!"

For a moment the full significance of the grim statement did not penetrate the young man's consciousness. It took a little time for Dan to realize what the death of Captain Scarsdale meant as far as he himself was concerned.

Scarsdale had been the only man alive who knew that Dan Slade was NOT the outlaw he had been labeled, and that his association with the huge Durango was for the exclusive purpose of bringing the killer into the hands of the Texas Rangers.

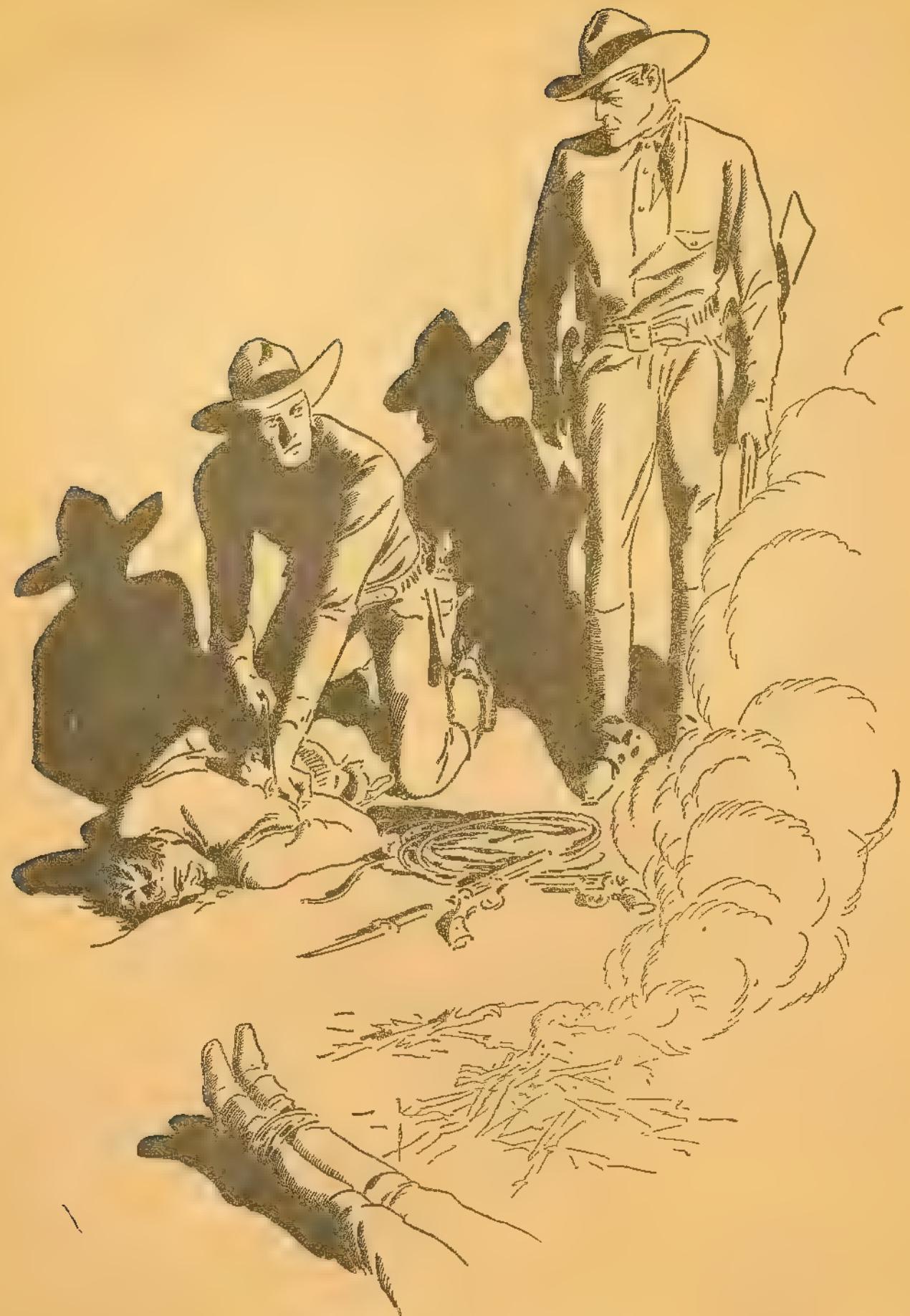
Dan began to realize how desperate his position was.

"Look here," he said to Brealt, "I'm not a partner of that killer. I was sent out to trap him. Captain Scarsdale and I had an agreement. He gave me the assignment in secret."

Brealt snorted his disbelief.

"That'll do," he barked. "Don't let the name of the Captain cross yer lips again. If you do, I'm likely to mash 'em so you won't be wantin' tuh talk!"

"But you gotta LISTEN; you gotta BELIEVE WHAT I SAY!"



Dan Slade and the Outlaw Durango Were Captured

"Likely story, YOU bein' sent out on an assignment. Humph!"

The Lone Ranger interrupted Dan Slade's story at this point.

"I can understand just how you felt," he said. "There have been a lot of cases in these western states where the wrong men have been hanged."

"I didn't see the way out."

Dan didn't pause in his efforts to dig the masked man from the ground. It was tedious task. His back ached and his fingers stung and burned with every handful of the shale he moved.

"Tell me," said the masked man, "didn't Scarsdale leave any word with one of the other men before he died?"

Dan Slade shook his head.

"I thought o' that, thought he might have done so, but there wasn't a chance. I learned from questionin' Brealt that Scarsdale was shot sudden, and died instantly, without a chance tuh talk."

The Lone Ranger realized the situation. He himself had once been a member of the Texas Rangers. He knew full well how grim and determined those manhunters were. He asked Dan to continue.

CHAPTER XIV

Freedom

DAN SLADE told the Lone Ranger how, when he was captured, he sat there in his bonds, watching Brealt, who squatted at the side of the huge killer Durango. For the first time, Dan really studied Durango, and the description he gave the Lone Ranger was a horrible one.

From where Dan lay captive, he could see Durango's hands which were shielded by his body from the view of the Texas Ranger. Dan stared at what he saw. In some manner, the killer had acquired a knife. He must have had it when captured, and managed to retain it in spite of the search he underwent. He gripped the sharp

blade in one hand, and the cords had already been cut free from his wrists. All this time, Durango had only shammed sleep. He was ready, simply waiting for the chance to leap, and stab, and rid himself of the guard, Brealt.

Dan shrilled a warning but too late. The killer struck deep into the chest of the ranger.

Tied as he was, Dan Slade was helpless to do anything but watch the awful spectacle. Brealt had not a chance to defend himself against the surprise attack. He half rose, to meet the driving force of Durango, but the blow forced him back, and he staggered a couple of paces, before sinking to the ground. Durango held the knife, still roaring foul oaths like some jungle beast driven to blood-lust. He slashed away the cords that held his ankles, and then made for Dan Slade.

"Double-cross," bellowed the quarter-breed, "I heard all you said. You trap me, eh? Now I show you."

He lifted the knife high over Dan Slade's head. Dan lived a lifetime in that instant. He saw the blind rage in Durango's face, saw the red stain on the blade, and saw that blade begin to slash down toward his chest. Then he heard a shot.

The force of the bullet, snapped by the dying Texas Ranger, was enough to knock Durango off his balance. Brealt's gun barked again, and a small hole appeared, as if by magic, squarely in the center of the quarter-breed's low forehead. The knife fell from his nerveless fingers, and struck the ground at Dan Slade's side. Durango gurgled something inaudible, then his knees seemed to buckle beneath his huge bulk.

Unable to believe the miracle that had happened to save his life for the time being, Dan Slade looked toward Brealt. Even as he looked, Brealt dropped his six-gun to the ground. The faintest trace of a smile showed on the Texas Ranger's face, then—he must have been with his friend, Captain Scarsdale.

Dan Slade sat quietly for some time, hardly able to believe that he was still alive, that Durango the quarter-breed was dead as well as Brealt, the Texas Ranger.

Durango's knife lay on the ground beside him.



Brealt's Gun Barked Again—and Durango Toppled

A minute of squirming brought him into a position so his hands could grip it behind his back. He had to hold it awkwardly to bring the edge of the blade against the cords that held his wrists. Several times he cut himself, before his hands were finally free.

He rubbed his wrists a little while to restore circulation, before he went to work on the cords around his ankles. One thought, and only one, was in his mind. Escape!

Dan wasted no time. Other Rangers would arrive at any moment, and he intended to put plenty of space between him and the place where double death had struck. He saddled Jim Brealt's horse and packed the camp equipment behind the saddle. Then he collected guns and ammunition and rode away.

Dan stood back, breathing heavily, his task of excavation just about completed.

"You can haul yerself out of there now," he told the Lone Ranger. "I don't expect you tuh

believe any of my story. It's too far-fetched fer anyone to believe, an' there's no way I can prove any part of it. But I wanted to tell it to you anyhow. Now I'm headin' down the rest of the mountain."

With that, Dan Slade was gone. The Lone Ranger watched him, as he sat down on the shale, and completed his slide.

"Too far-fetched to believe," he thought. "That's the very reason I DO believe his story."

He dragged himself from the shallow pit that remained after the fugitive's efforts, and tried to stand. He was surprised how weak he felt. It took all of his remaining strength simply to stand erect.

Following Dan Slade's example, he sat down on the slope, bracing himself with his hands, with his feet extended in front of him, and slid down into the valley. Silver was there to meet him. The horse whinnied its pleasure at the reunion, and muzzled the masked man gently.

"Silver," the Lone Ranger whispered, "this is the toughest trail we've ever followed, for more reasons than one."

He gripped the pommel of the saddle to steady himself, and with great effort managed to fork the horse. Once in the saddle, all he had to do was hang on, and the mighty Silver would do the rest.

The Lone Ranger's command of "Find Tonto," was all that was required. Unerringly, the stallion made the hill, then headed for the home of Martha Westerly and her daughter Betsy.

CHAPTER XV

Quiet Interlude

THE LONE RANGER paused, weak as he was, outside of Martha Westerly's house.

There he examined Silver. He found his horse bruised from the spill downhill, but de-

cided there was nothing that a day's rest would not cure. Juan Riviera came to him, and tried by voluble explanations to apologize for his actions.

"Never mind," he told Juan. "I understand. If you'll just see that my horse is given food and water and a place to rest, we'll call it square."

Juan acceded eagerly, his thin face beaming with smiles where there had been only repentance and fear.

When the masked man climbed the two steps to the porch of the Westerly's home, he realized again how weak and spent he was. He had to lean against a pillar for a time to steady himself before going inside.

Martha Westerly greeted the masked man inside the house. She explained that Dan Slade had stopped again at the house before starting out a second time, and given the strictest of orders that both Tonto and the masked man should be given the very best of care. Tonto was stretched out on a couch in the living room. The Lone Ranger



Tonto Was Stretched Out on a Couch in the Living Room



Betsy Set the Bowl of Broth on a
Nearby Table

went to his Indian friend's side, and knelt there, examining the dressing on the wound.

"It all right," Tonto told him. "Wound not bad. Get well plenty soon."

"Are you sure it isn't serious? You look as if you'd suffered, Tonto."

At this point Betsy came into the room carrying a bowl of steaming broth.

"You'd better drink this," she said, handing it to the Lone Ranger. "Dan told me about you, and asked me to fix it for you."

"Did Dan Slade tell you who we were?" he asked.

Betsy nodded.

"He told us all about you."

"Then why do you want to help us? I should think you'd be the last one in the world to give us help."

Betsy set the bowl down on a nearby table.

"You can take the broth, or leave it!" she said coolly. "The sooner you get well, the sooner you'll leave here."

"To start after Dan Slade again!"

"You won't catch Dan Slade! He knows the country north of here. You wouldn't have caught him, even if you hadn't been delayed. The only

reason Mother and I are helping you is because Dan asked us to. He felt that Juan had no right to shoot at you from ambush. If it hadn't been for that, you wouldn't have been hurt! As long as we are to blame for whatever injuries you've had, we'll try and square things!"

The masked man stood, swaying slightly, but he felt stronger than he had a half hour ago. He sipped some of the broth and found it good. Tonto, he learned, had just finished a similar bowl of the invigorating fluid.

"You've got to hurry and get well, Tonto," he said, "so we can get away from here."

But it took longer than he thought. Mrs. Westerly would not hear of the masked man or Tonto leaving her house the next morning. A spare bedroom had been set aside for him and Tonto, and the two had all the privacy they wanted. Three times daily, Betsy came with food, and later to take away the tray of empty dishes. On these occasions, the Lone Ranger managed to question her a little concerning Dan Slade. She remained aloof and cool, but answered his questions directly. He asked many questions and all had a purpose.

For the Lone Ranger began to see that Dan Slade was worth saving. He was hopeful that there would be a way out.

CHAPTER XVI

Trail's End

THE two, Tonto and the Lone Ranger, were on the third day of their hunt. The trail had been long and arduous. But something told the masked man that they were near the end of their hunt. Suddenly, Tonto called a halt.

"You take-um look!" Tonto said as he pointed.

The Lone Ranger looked ahead, toward the spot where Tonto pointed. There on the ground, he saw a large dark object, standing out against the lighter color of the surrounding rocks. Shading his eyes with his hands, he could make out



It Was Dan Slade's Horse

more clearly what it was, "A horse."

"That right. Dan Slade's horse!"

It was Dan Slade's horse. The animal had been dead for some time. It meant that Slade was traveling afoot and traveling light, the Lone Ranger decided. But Tonto did not agree with him. His alert eyes had spied the unusual. "You take-um look," he said, "at shadow of rock!"

The masked man did so. The shadow was Dan Slade. Gun in hand the Ranger advanced on foot toward the rock where Dan Slade was waiting.

He walked on, grim, determined, menacing. Dan Slade called out.

"Stand where you are. I'm tellin' yuh, Lone Ranger, I don't want tuh kill you, but I swear I'll shoot before I let you take me in. I won't go back and hang for somethin' I didn't do."

"You'll not shoot at me!" called the Lone Ranger.

The man in the mask kept walking. Fifteen yards, fifteen more long strides, would bring him to the rock.

Five paces more, then Dan Slade screamed. "Lone Ranger, I beg you—stop!"

The Lone Ranger walked straight to the rock, around it, and faced Dan Slade, leaning against

the rock, his gun dangling from limp fingers at his side. Dan's face was haggard with a week's growth of beard.

"I—I—couldn't shoot you, Lone Ranger," he whispered. "I—reckon you win."

The masked man holstered his own gun and spoke softly.

"I'll take charge of your gun now, Dan." He took the weapon, then stooped and picked up half of Dan's few belongings.

"I'm going to help you, Dan. But I'll help you in my own way. You'll do as I tell you."

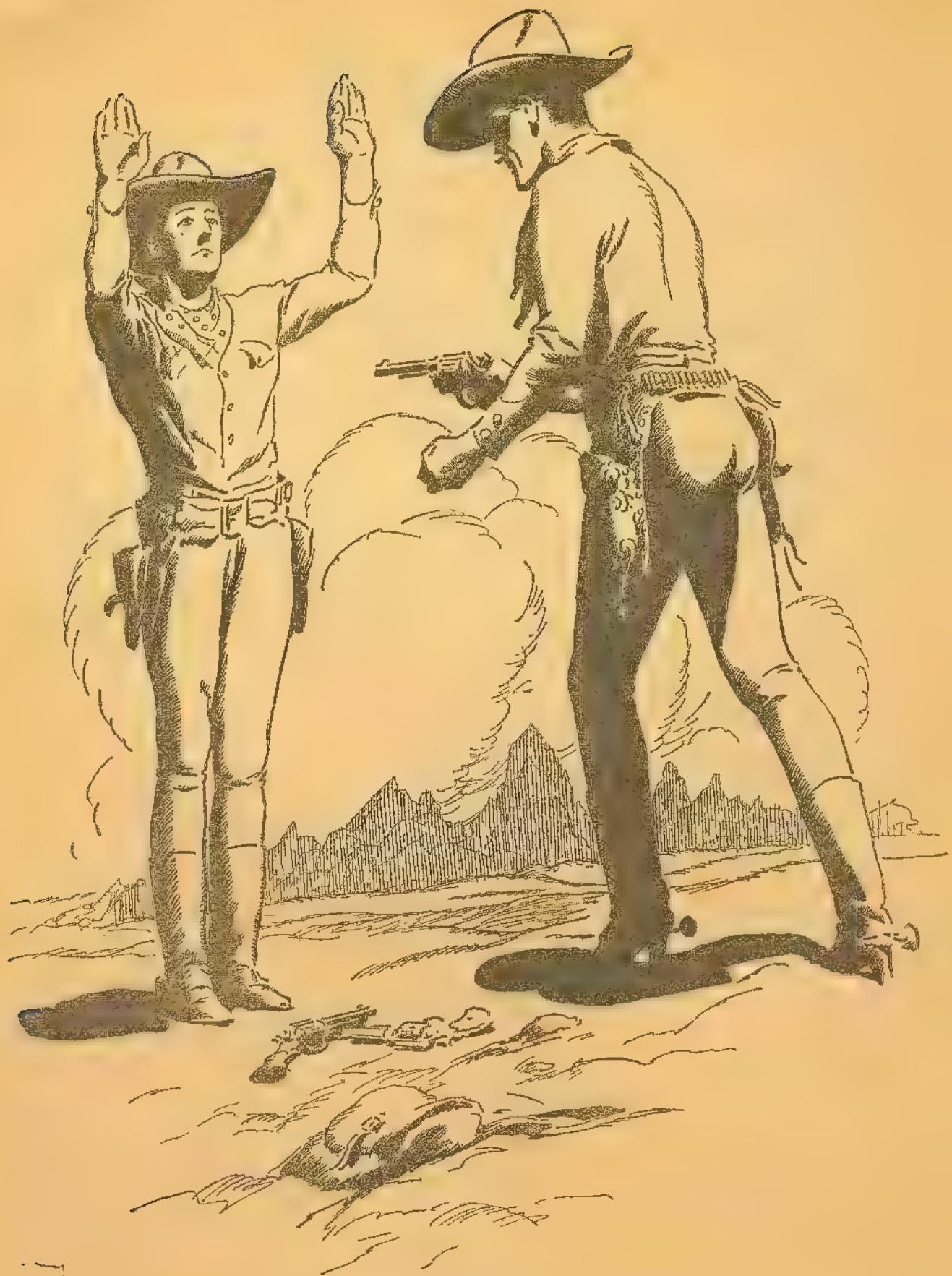
"After you have been turned over to the law in Texas, Dan Slade, I'm going to be on YOUR SIDE!"

"M-My side?" Dan could hardly believe what he heard. "Y-Yuh mean tuh say you're goin' to help me? Tuh help show that I didn't commit a murder?"

"That's exactly what I mean! I'm convinced you're innocent, and I'm going to try just as hard to prove it as I did to get you back to trial."



Forty Yards Separated Him From the Boulder



"I—I—Couldn't Shoot You, Lone Ranger—You Win."

Dan Slade's shoulders straightened. His head snapped erect.

"The Lone Ranger," he breathed, "on my side! Let's git goin', and git back to Texas!"

CHAPTER XVII

The Trial

NEWS SPREAD with incredible speed when Dan Slade was captured and taken back to Texas.

Ebenezer Gorman heard it, with delight, and vowed that he would see to it personally that Slade paid in full for what he had done. Dan must suffer for it.

Gorman had no doubt that Slade would hang, but he was not taking any chances. He went from Goose River to Orlando, where Dan was to stand trial. He not only wanted to attend the trial, but also wanted the satisfaction of gloating over Slade's predicament, and, if possible, to attend the hanging.

Orlando, ordinarily a sleepy cattle town, became alive! The county seat, it was, of course, the sheriff's headquarters, and headquarters for a detachment of Texas Rangers as well. Sheriff Bronson took charge of the prisoner at the request of the Rangers, and saw him locked securely in the one-room jail.

Almost overnight, Orlando became active. It was the hub toward which all trails merged as ranchers came to see the trial and hanging of a man so ruthless! No jury would defy that angry mob of visitors in town, to bring any sentence other than death. No witness would dare testify in behalf of Dan Slade.

One man in town refused to talk, or to listen to the talk that went around. A stranger whom nobody knew, he seemed to be in every group of people, yet apart from it, hearing what went on, yet paying scant attention to it. No one noticed that his face was disguised with stains made from herbs and roots. No one suspected that it was the Lone Ranger, there in disguise,

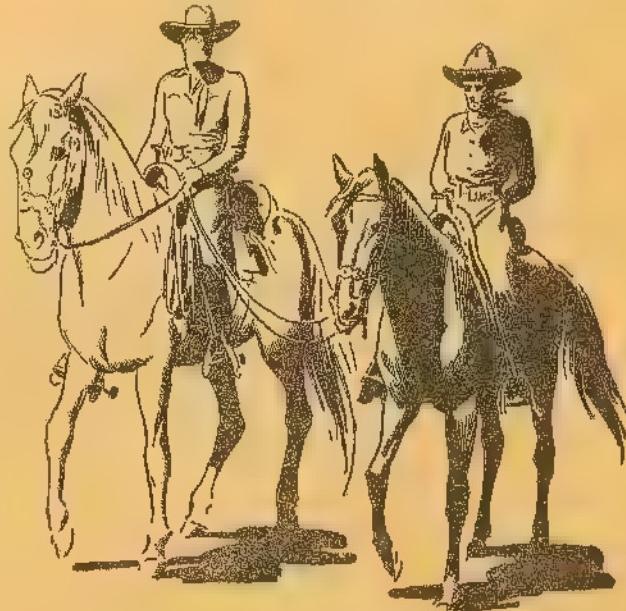
to keep a close watch on developments, and see just how the trial would turn.

When the trial was called, the courthouse was jammed to overflowing. People packed the opened doors and windows, and fought with each other to get a look at the prisoner as he was led in, shackled between two deputies.

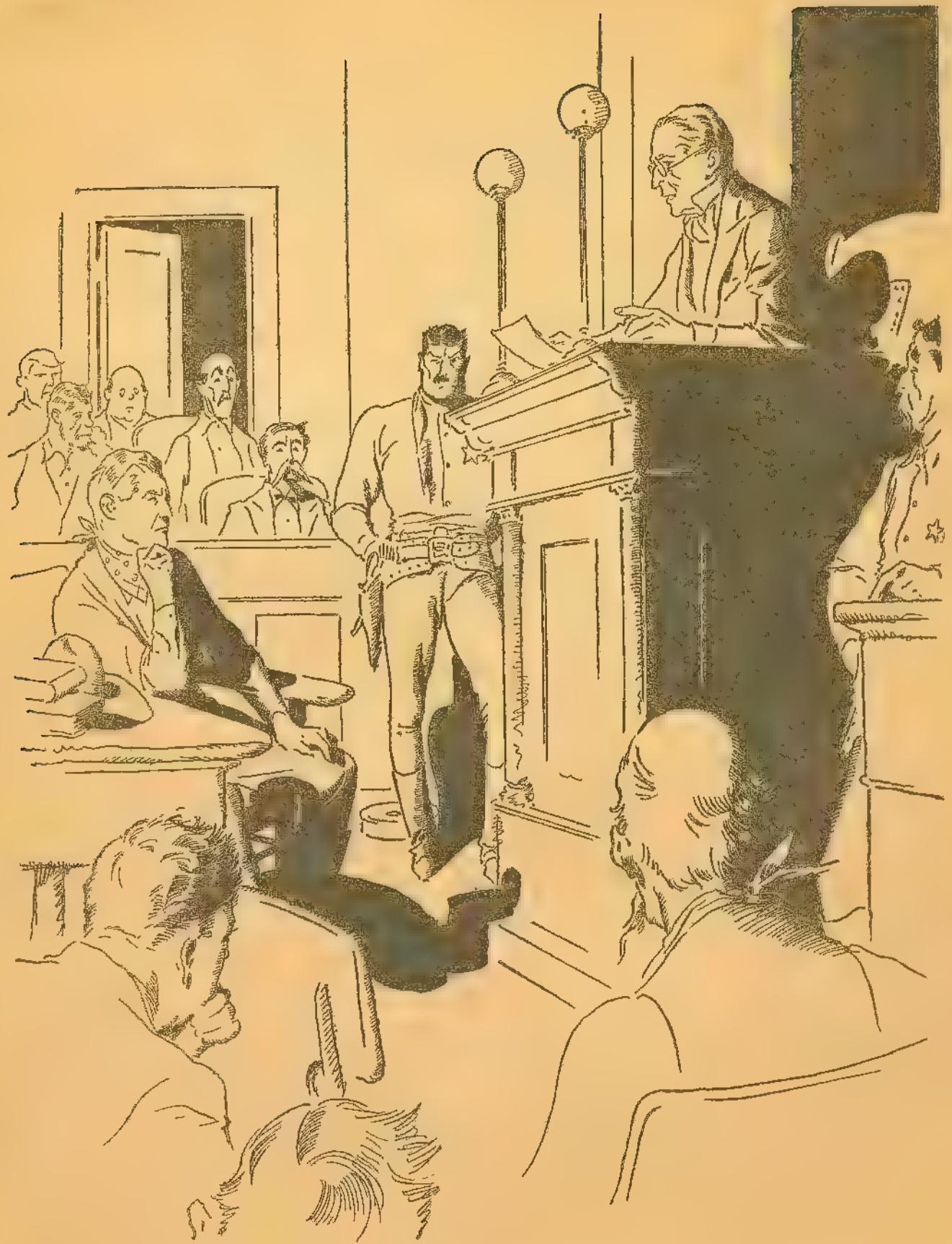
The clerk had to rap a long time to get the place quiet, and Judge Thorn, a former Army man, frowned at the attitude of the people as a whole. When it was quiet, the Judge gave a sharp lecture, advising people that, until proved guilty, the prisoner was innocent. He warned against a demonstration of any sort, and threatened to clear the courtroom and hold the trial privately, with only the jury and the witnesses on hand, should order not prevail. This threat did the trick. When the first witness was called, one could have heard a pin drop.

The first day of the trial proceeded with one witness after another being called upon to testify. Handbills, showing that Dan Slade was wanted by the law, were introduced by the prosecution, and there was no way to show that Captain Scarsdale of the Texas Rangers had caused these to be printed, simply as part of a trap to catch Durango.

People who had been robbed by Durango



The Lone Ranger Took His Captive Back to Stand Trial



The Trial of Dan Slade

identified Dan Slade as his partner. The Texas Rangers gave the most damaging of all the testimony when they narrated how Dan had been captured with Durango, and how they later found both Durango and the Ranger named Brealt dead, and Dan Slade gone.

Then Gorman took the stand, and though he lied a great deal, he did stick to the truth when he told how Dan had called on him and made him surrender money to Lem Loftus. He made this appear to be a ruthless robbery.

When the Commandant of the Texas Rangers was sworn in to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, he told how he had met the Lone Ranger. How that masked mystery rider had pledged himself to find Dan Slade and bring him back, and how he had fulfilled that pledge and ridden away in his characteristic manner, without awaiting thanks or reward.

The mere fact that the Lone Ranger had brought Dan Slade in, would have been enough to condemn him, without other evidence.

For the defense, there was but one man. Dan Slade himself. He told his story simply, truthfully, and heard a tittering among the crowd. It was too far-fetched for them to believe. He had known it would be. Even the Judge warned him several times to stick to the truth. When the trial ended, the case was given to the jury on the day following. Dan Slade knew the answer then. There could be but one verdict.

The jury was out only long enough to cast a single ballot, and then returned.

"Have you reached a verdict?"

"We have."

They found the prisoner guilty as charged, and the crowd cheered. Dan sat stunned; not because of the verdict—it had been expected—but because he had counted on the word of the Lone Ranger. Had not the Lone Ranger promised him that he would help? Had not the masked man, up north in the badlands, said that as soon as he had turned Dan over to the law, he would work in his behalf? Had the Lone Ranger broken his word? Where was the Lone Ranger?

As if from a great distance, Dan Slade heard a voice saying, "The prisoner will stand and face the court."

Hands gripped each of his arms, and almost lifted him to his feet. He walked mechanically, dazed, toward the Judge's bench, and looked into the frowning countenance of Judge Thorn.

"Have you anything to say, before this court passes sentence?" asked the monotonous voice of the Judge.

Dan Slade had much to say, yet nothing that would be worth saying. "I—Judge," he faltered, "was—wasn't there a masked man, the one that captured me, didn't he say anything to you, or the sheriff?"

"He did not," replied the court very emphatically.

"Has—hasn't he been around town at all? Haven't you heard from him?"

"No."

"We—well, then I reckon I ain't got nothin' more tuh say."

He dropped his eyes. The Lone Ranger, the man after whom he had hoped to model his own life, had failed him. He heard Judge Thorn sentence him to be held in the custody of the sheriff, until the morning of the 29th; at which time he was to be taken to the gallows and hanged by the neck till dead.

"And may God have mercy on your soul!" were the concluding words.

The Lone Ranger waited in Orlando for the trial. He had to know what testimony was given, and who testified. He had been one of the horde that jammed into the small courthouse, and it angered him to see the way the crowd made a Roman holiday of the solemn plight of a man on trial for his life.

When Ebenezer Gorman took the stand, the Lone Ranger, disguised, and not wearing his mask, found it hard to remain quietly in his seat. He would not have been able to if so much had not depended upon it.

Then, as Dan Slade stood to be sentenced, it tore at his very heartstrings, to see the look that crossed the young man's face when he thought the Lone Ranger had failed him. He rose, and



Hi-Yo Silver! Away!

shoved through the jam toward the door. Tonto was waiting outside. He met the Indian, and took the reins of Silver from him, leading the horse around to the side of the courthouse where a score of people were packed at the windows.

"I'll start from here," he muttered to Tonto. "There's a lot of ground to be covered. You know the plans."

Tonto nodded silently, and prepared to mount his Paint Horse. The Lone Ranger spoke hurriedly.

"The execution is set for the morning of the 29th. That gives us less than a week. You know just where you're to go, don't you, Tonto?"

"Me know-um."

"Good." No one noticed the two. Every-

body was intent on what went on inside the courthouse. The Lone Ranger slipped his mask over his eyes, and mounted. "I wanted to bring Silver here, so Dan Slade inside there, could hear. It may give him hope."

Tonto grinned and nodded. He was ready for the masked man's word to ride. The Lone Ranger wheeled his mighty stallion, and raised his voice in the familiar shout:

"Hi-Yo Silver! Away!"

The thunder of hoofs that followed made all eyes turn, and a hundred people cried as one:

"THE LONE RANGER!"

Inside the court, with hope at lowest ebb, Dan Slade's face lit up magically.

"The Lone Ranger," he whispered. "He hasn't left me yet."

The Lone Ranger thundered out of town, riding as he had seldom ridden before. Riding now in a cause he favored, riding to aid a man who was about to die unfairly.

Meanwhile, they were building the gallows in Orlando.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Lone Ranger to the Rescue

ONLY the faith that Dan Slade held in the Lone Ranger kept him from going mad as he waited and listened to the preparations for his hanging.

Those from out of town, who had arrived for the trial, remained for the hanging, and prominent among them still was Ebenezer Gorman.

Several people who knew her, called on a widow who lived in a little cottage on the outskirts of Orlando, to extend their sympathies, supposedly, but in reality to satisfy their curiosities and see how the widow of the dead Captain Scarsdale of the Texas Rangers was bearing up under the excitement.

Mrs. Scarsdale tried to explain to them that it was not Dan Slade who killed her husband, but the half-hysterical crowd were in no mood to

get their facts straight. Dan Slade, it seemed, was blamed for everything that had ever happened in the state of Texas, the murder of Captain Scarsdale among other things.

The day before the execution, Mrs. Scarsdale closed her home to visitors, except a chosen few. In the afternoon, a wagon arrived, drawn by two tired horses. Lem Loftus, and his wife, Sara, were aboard it. They turned the horses over to a servant, and introduced themselves to Mrs. Scarsdale.

As soon as they mentioned their names, the widow raised a small white hand, and smiled faintly.

"I understand. You needn't explain further. Please come in and make yourselves quite comfortable."

Somewhat confused, and very tired from the long trip, Lem and Sara entered.

Then, toward sunset, three people rode to the rear of the Scarsdale home astride exhausted horses. Betsy Westerly dismounted, and helped her mother to the ground.

"If somethin' don't come of a ride like this," complained Martha Westerly, "I'll shoot that red-skin on sight, I declare I will."

Juan Riviera took the horses to a stable, while the women went to the house. Mrs. Scarsdale asked their names, and told them that they were expected. They went inside, and met the Loftus couple.

Dan Slade, of course, knew nothing of this. For a week, he had been trying to use his logic and reason, trying to think of some way in which the Lone Ranger could be of aid.

The mob would never stand for any stay of execution. He could hear them, as the sun went down, and the crowds gathered in the cafes for the evening. They were in a festive mood, making a holiday of his death.

The only light in Dan Slade's cell was that which shone in from the sheriff's office just beyond the barred door. He could see the guards there, heavily armed with both pistols and rifles. They were taking no chances on an attempted escape.

It was a gala night for them, this night for the



Betsy Rode to Orlando

hanging. The folks in Mrs. Scarsdale's home waited. Some dozed, some spoke fretfully.

A little later in the night, the judge who had presided at Dan Slade's trial appeared, much to the surprise of everyone.

"Quite a little gathering," he observed.

Mrs. Scarsdale introduced him to Sara Loftus, and Lem, the Army men, the Westerlys, and Juan, and when she finished, two men in the outfit of the Texas Rangers were on hand, with Tonto, the Indian.

They were waiting, all of them. Waiting, ready to do their utmost to see a man given the fairest chance in the world; waiting, for the coming of the Lone Ranger.

The Lone Ranger, a tired figure, was on his way to the house of Mrs. Scarsdale. He had driven hard. Any delay might make him too late. Arriving in the town he made his way to Mrs. Scarsdale's house. Leaving Silver, the Lone Ranger entered the home of Mrs. Scarsdale. The widow saw him first. Her soft face lighted, and all other eyes in the room were turned upon him. Above several murmurs, he could hear the widow's softly breathed statement:

"He has arrived."

For a minute, the masked man did not speak.

He looked around the room, studying each expectant face.

Then he said to the widow, "Is he here?"

Mrs. Scarsdale nodded, and indicated a direction with her finger. The Lone Ranger thereupon took charge of the meeting.

"I've had you all come here," he said, "because of Dan Slade. All any of you can do is to speak in behalf of Slade, concerning his character, and that would have meant nothing at his trial. Besides that, he was convicted by the mob, before he ever entered that courthouse."

"I resent that!" blurted Judge Thorn.

The Lone Ranger continued his little address.

"We who are here, know him best. We can tell of the things he has done, of his record in the Army, his hopes for the future, his aims and ambitions. I will tell you the story he told me, of why he was judged to be an outlaw, and how he happened to be with Durango."

The masked man paused, and then explained in great detail just what Dan Slade had told him while he was buried in the shale on the side of the dangerous mountain.

He told how Dan could have been free, by simply riding off and leaving him to die. He told of the next time they met, and how Dan could so easily have shot him, if he had been a killer. Then he called on Lem Loftus, who told his own story, of the justice Dan Slade risked capture to bring him.

The Colonel spoke highly of Slade's Army record, his courage and clear thinking, and his ambitions. Betsy and her mother also spoke. Then Juan told how Slade had been infuriated when he fired that shot at Tonto.

It took a long time for the stories to be concluded, and Judge Thorn became one of the most attentive listeners. It was early morning when the last of the speakers finished. The Judge Thorn spoke up.

"It's all interesting. I'm as firmly convinced as any of you, that Slade's all you say, but I still don't see the sense of this meeting! It's not in my province to change the verdict. I can't even grant a new trial."

"What," asked the masked man, "would be

required to get a new trial?"

"If there was time," retorted the Judge, "you might get all these folks to the Governor of the state an' tell the story, an' maybe he'd issue a stay of execution, or somethin'."

"That won't be necessary!" It was a new voice, a deep, booming one, that came from the doorway of the sitting room. "I was upstairs when you folks came here, and crept down when all this talk started."

The assemblage stared in amazement.

"Let me," said the Lone Ranger, "present His Honor, the Governor of Texas!"

"If you will get me pen, ink and paper," His Honor requested, "I'll sign the essential papers, but it will have to be done quickly!"

The Lone Ranger looked out. The hour was more advanced than he had realized. It was already beginning to get light, and Dan Slade was to hang at dawn.

Tonto was already racing from the room.

"Me saddle horse," he called back.

"My own horse," snapped the Lone Ranger! He had been with Silver throughout all those miles, seeking the army men, the Governor, the Captain of another Fort, and wanted the gallant horse with him on this last mile of his desperate race to save Dan Slade.

Dan Slade, at that very moment, was being taken from his cell.

Halfway to the gallows, a cloaked man stepped beside him, and touched his arm.

"Courage, my son," he whispered, and then murmured the prayer, "The Lord is my Shepherd . . ."

Dan tried to concentrate on that calm, soft voice and shut out the cacophony beyond it.

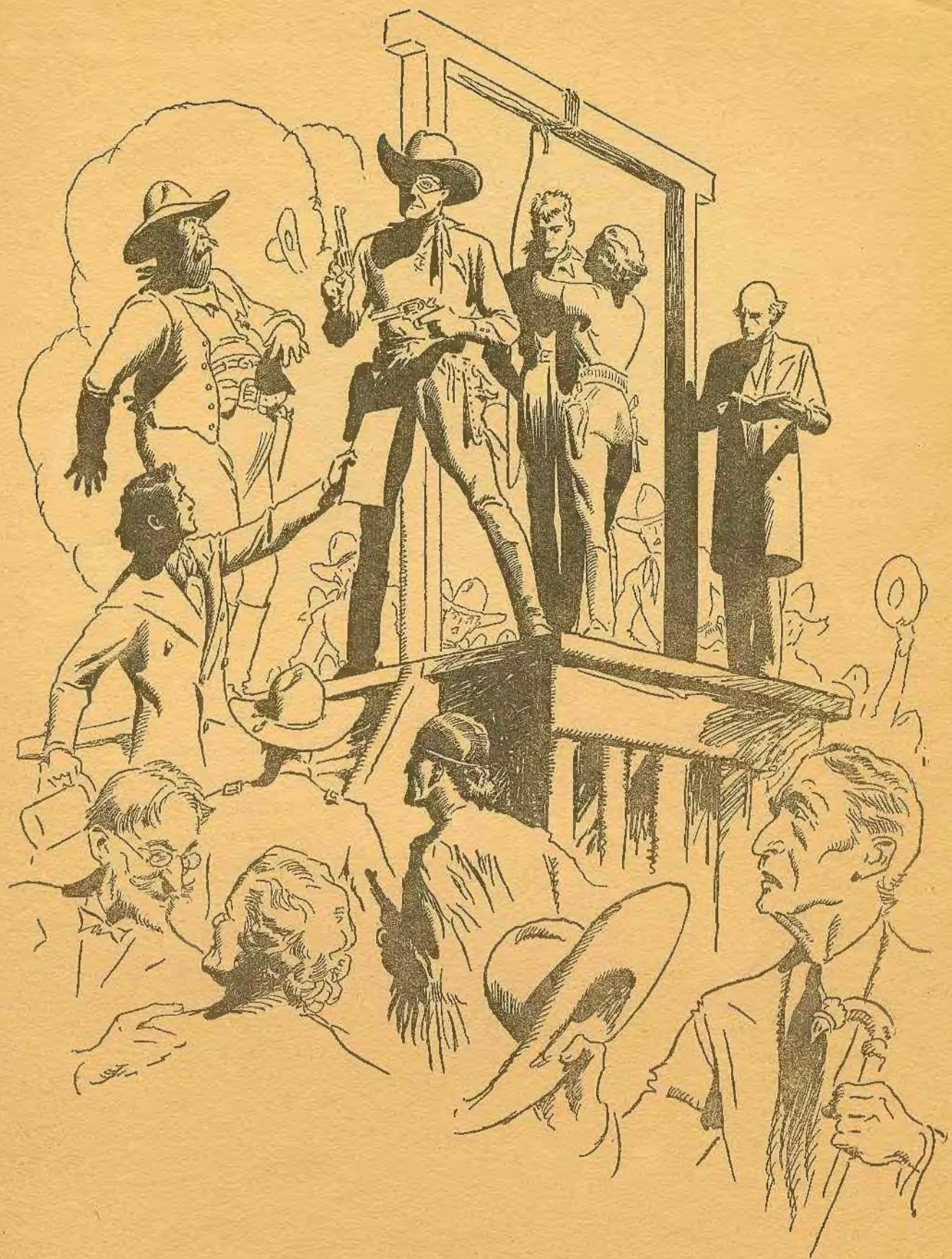
Then another voice, a shout, rose above all other sounds. It seemed to come from a great distance.

"Hi-Yo Silver!"

It WAS the Lone Ranger. Dan Slade heard the hoof beats of the mighty stallion, heard a hundred throats take up the cry!

"The Lone Ranger!"

He heard the masked man thunder close, and booted feet run up the gallows steps.



The Lone Ranger Was in the Nick of Time

"I have a pardon for Dan Slade, a pardon signed by the governor."

There was a brief argument while the sheriff examined the paper. Someone tore away the blindfold, and Dan, dazed, heard the sheriff declaring flatly that the paper was a forgery.

"This paper is authentic, and if you don't believe that, wait a minute, and the governor himself will be here!"

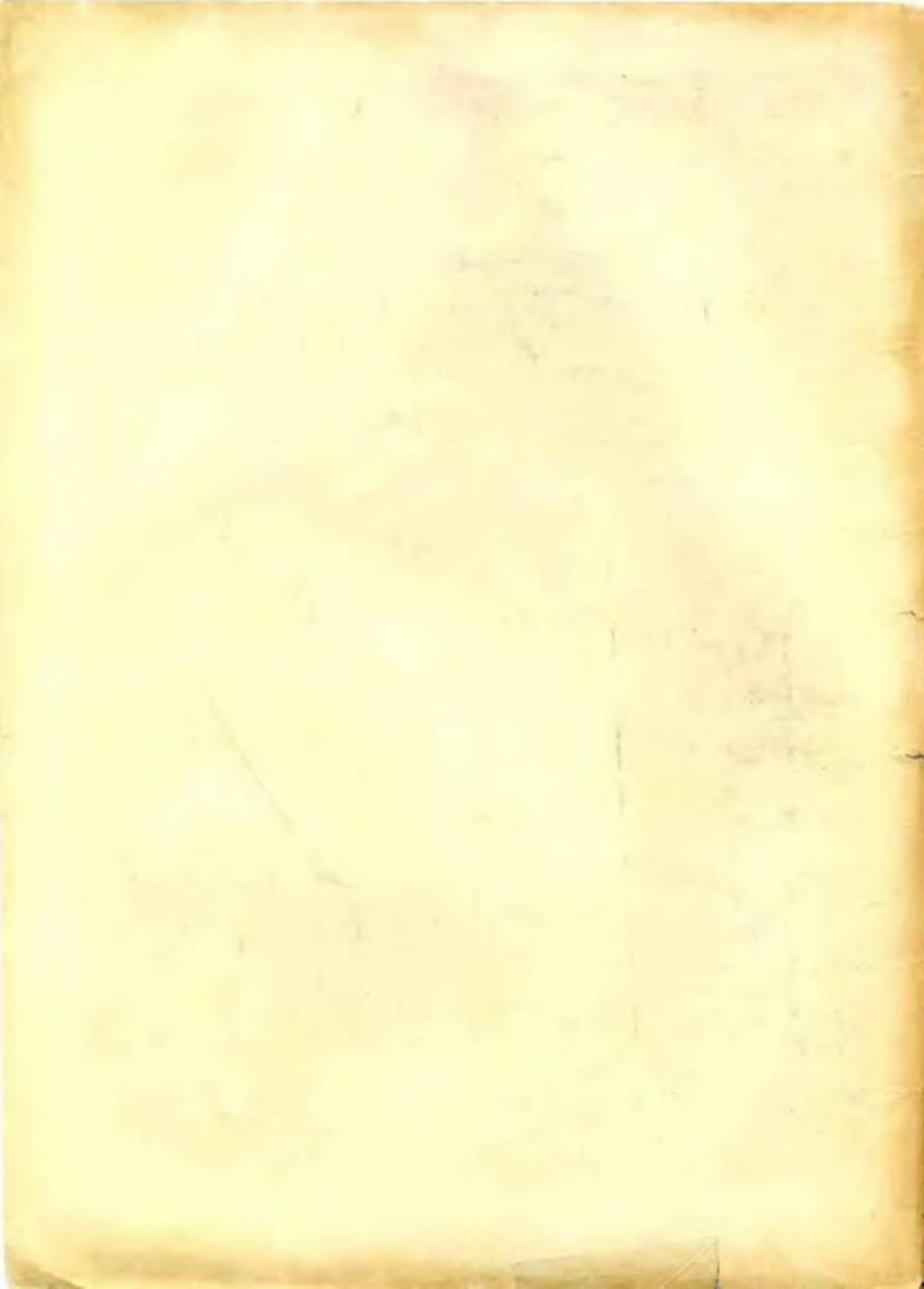
Dan choked back a sob, but he could not trust himself to speak. He saw the rising sun beyond his friends, a new sun for a new day, a new LIFE for Dan Slade.

He found his hands were free, and he walked down the gallows steps, and into the arms of Betsy.

The Lone Ranger did not wait beyond that happy moment. The memory of that was his reward. He went quickly to his big white horse, mounted, and, followed by the faithful Tonto on Scout, rode away.

The crowd, and Dan Slade and all his friends, did not realize that the masked man had gone till they heard his farewell, the same familiar cry:

"Hi-Yo Silver! Awa-a-ay!"



HI-YO SILVER THE LONE RANGER TO THE RESCUE

BASED ON
THE FAMOUS
RADIO PROGRAM

